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# LOUIS RIEL

THE REBELLION OF 1885

G. H. NEEDLER





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Here is a part of Canada's history to be read with vivid interest, described from first-hand knowledge and with the scholarship and accuracy which we have come to expect from Professor Needler. His chief concern has been to present a complete account of the military operations that were necessary to suppress Louis Riel's Rebellion of 1885. As he does so, he takes us with him once again on a most memorable campaign, crossing by bobsleigh or on foot in wintry March weather the gaps in the unfinished CPR. From Toronto he travelled 2,000 miles to reach the scene of conflict. The field of operations covered an area 50 miles from east to west and 200 miles from south to north — and there were several excursions of many miles outside these limits. So the famous Battleford Column and the Queen's Own Rifles contributed to the defeat of Riel, to make Canada the nation of today.

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LOUIS RIEL



# ***LOUIS RIEL***

**THE REBELLION OF 1885**

*by*

**G. H. NEEDLER**

**TORONTO  
BURNS & MACEachern  
1957**



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## P R E F A C E

In the writing of this book my chief concern has been to present a complete account of the military operations that were necessary to suppress the Rebellion of 1885.

I have refrained from entering upon a discussion of the political, racial and religious issues involved in the whole affair. Riel's criminal conduct in inciting the Indians all over the Northwest territories to go on the warpath itself settles the question of his guilt, and makes simply ludicrous the desire of a certain number of Canadians to have him viewed as a hero and a martyr.

The extracts which I have quoted from his *Poesies religieuses et politiques*, added to the letter written by him to the editor of the Irish World in New York three days before the battle at Batoche began, are commended to the attention of those who still see in him a patriotic Canadian.

G.H.N.

University College  
Toronto

## PRELIMINARY SURVEY

The official record of the campaign of 1885 in the Canadian Northwest is preserved in the *Report upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories and Matters in Connection Therewith*, in 1885, which was presented to Parliament by the Department of Militia and Defence in May, 1886. This *Report*, which contains the despatches of Major-General Middleton and his subordinate officers regarding the military operations, as well as returns from the heads of the military services, is the source to which we must go for the primary historical facts.

The story of the campaign as a whole would, however, remain incomplete unless augmented by the first-hand accounts published later by several of the participants regarding operations for which they were immediately responsible, or events that came directly under their notice, notably those of Major-General Strange, Major Boulton, and Lieutenant-Colonel Denison. Among these later unofficial accounts of the campaign is that of the General Officer Commanding, Major-General Middleton himself, who in 1885 was in command of the Canadian Militia and directing chief of all the forces called out. This account appeared in London, England, in four successive issues of the *United Service Magazine* (November and December,



1893, and January and February, 1894). It is substantially a retelling of his despatches to the Minister of Militia at the time. But in it, Middleton, after a lapse of eight years, is taking a more leisurely survey of the stirring events that then engrossed him, and writing a more connected narrative for a larger public. This account, edited by me with an introduction and numerous corrective notes, was published in 1948 by the University of Toronto Press. As this important first-hand document of Canadian history has unfortunately been allowed to go out of print, I will offer no apology for quoting extensively from it here.

When the Rebellion broke out in March, 1885, the Canadian Pacific Railway was not quite completed. The opening of the campaign against Riel was made particularly difficult by this circumstance and by the unusually severe winter weather. Hastening to take charge of operations General Middleton was able to travel as a civilian by train through Chicago and St. Paul to Winnipeg. Armed Canadian troops, however, had to keep to an all-Canadian route; and all of those from Ontario and eastward were required, therefore, to make their way as best they could over the 300 miles of broken line of the C.P.R. along Lake Superior between a point near the present station of Chapleau and Red Rock, a few miles west of Nipigon. These 300 miles were the "North Shore" of unhallowed memory.

The winter of 1885 was abnormally long and severe. As the troops made their way along the North Shore at the end of March and the beginning of April, the region was covered with snow several feet deep, and the thermometer was steadily away below zero. Otter's force had it 25 below, and even out on the prairie General Middleton records 25 below on April 7. The composite Midland battalion assembled at Kingston

on April 2 in a blizzard, with snow "piled mountains high". Construction of the railway along Lake Superior had been carried on by crews operating east and west from the head of several bays where men and equipment had been landed when the water was open. These had not yet been able to connect with one another. When the troops from the east reached this almost insurmountable obstacle, the 300 miles were made up of gaps, between which were stretches of road bed with engines and flatcars running on the newly laid rails. From end-of-rail on the east side of the line was as follows: a gap of 45 miles, rail for 90 miles, a gap of 22 miles, rail for 45 miles, a gap of 27 miles, rail for 52 miles, a gap of 11 miles. President Van Horne did wonders in aiding transportation and providing occasional meals at construction camps. The first gap was crossed, by the infantry of Otter's column at least, by means of a concentration of teams with bobsleighs. To pass the second gap the troops marched 22 miles across the ice of one of the bays of Lake Superior. At the third they were teamed again, and the fourth and last gap was once more done on foot across the ice. From Red Rock westward there was unbroken railway to the Rockies.

In this North Shore passage each arm of the service—artillery, infantry, cavalry—had its peculiar difficulties to overcome, and these might differ slightly, too, depending on whether the particular stretch of territory had to be traversed in the daytime or at night. But none could escape the terrible cold of 20 and more below zero, or the days of almost unrelieved strain, or four successive nights without sleep. Colonel Denison has written a graphic description of the passage with his cavalry, and gives in detail the evidence for thinking that compared with Napoleon's crossing of the Alps, "our trip was much the worst". The



Lake Superior section of the railway was completed before the campaign was over, but on the journey home the troops from Ontario did not need to revisit the transformed scene of their greatest trials; new C.P.R. steamers carried them from Fort William to Owen Sound.

General Middleton's conduct of the campaign raises many questions. In his account even the commander-in-chief could, of course, speak only from personal knowledge of what took place in the main column under his immediate command. For the rest he had to rely on the reports sent in to him; and it is clear that the commanders of the other two columns, Lieutenant-Colonel Otter and Major-General Strange, acted largely on their own initiative, and sometimes indeed contrary to general orders given to them by Middleton. When Middleton did allow Otter to hurry with a column to the relief of Battleford, it was much against his will, and only after most urgent appeals from the commander of the Mounted Police at Battleford reinforced by the judgment of Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney. His order to Otter then was to "sit tight" there until he should join him. Similarly, General Strange, working with his column from Calgary up to Edmonton and down the Saskatchewan, had orders to await his arrival at Fort Pitt before attacking Big Bear. Both Otter and Strange, feeling justified by a situation which Middleton at a distance could not understand, disobeyed orders by refusing to remain inactive. For this they both, and Otter particularly, got into the General's bad books.

Middleton's treatment of these two senior officers as well as of others, including Williams, Grasett and Denison, raises the whole much-disputed question of his general conduct of the campaign and his qualifications for the post of commander-in-chief. There is no blinking the fact that he made himself cordially dis-

liked by many, if not most, of the officers under him. It is, at the same time, no less true that he possessed in marked degree some of the prime requisites of the soldier. He was utterly fearless, even to what appeared at times unnecessary rashness; in this he was only living up to his high reputation for courage won in earlier campaigns in New Zealand and India. Though already in his sixtieth year, his physical endurance was equal to all the strain under which the trying campaign placed him. He was indefatigable in personal reconnoitring and in assuring himself of the security of his men by midnight inspection of picquets and many a duty which one might think could have been left to, or at least more often shared with, his subordinate officers. But in spite of all these qualities Middleton failed to win the confidence or the whole-hearted loyalty of his troops. Just why, it is hard to say convincingly. Part of the reason was that his willingness to do so much himself easily passed over into a too-obvious desire to assume the credit for everything himself.

The fighting force for the campaign of 1885 contained no British regulars, but was supplied entirely by the Canadian militia. By 1885 its nominal strength had grown to some 35,000 men. The training of this force had by that time, however, become rather desultory. The recruit was supposed to sign for three years, with 12 days of training in each year. Only in the larger cities were the battalions efficient as to drill, rifle practice, etc. The establishment of several training schools, first for artillery and then for infantry and cavalry, and the founding of the Royal Military College at Kingston in 1876 raised the training of officers to an equality with those in imperial service, and contributed immensely to the general efficiency of the militia. In the year 1883 an important further



advance toward stability was made by the establishment of units of regularly enlisted men in all three services. This is the "Permanent Militia" to which Middleton refers. In the cavalry and infantry they were called "School Corps". Enlistment in these corps was voluntary, but the men entering them became professional soldiers, and "regulars" in the fullest sense. Of these, some 355 men served with the North-West Field Force in 1885, more than half of them in the artillery.

When hostilities began in March, 1885, four places on the North Saskatchewan River at once became the chief danger points. These were Prince Albert and Fort Carlton, close to the half-breed headquarters at Batoche, and Battleford and Fort Pitt, 160 and 250 miles up the river, in the midst of Cree Indian tribes whose chiefs, Poundmaker and Big Bear, had now become open allies of Riel. At each of these places was stationed a detachment of North West Mounted Police, altogether too small, as was immediately evident, to control the situation. The remarkably efficient Mounted Police force had been organized 11 years before, and already their stockaded forts had begun to dot the immense Lone Land between the Rockies and Manitoba, and from the United States border up to and beyond the Saskatchewan River. They performed wonders as keepers of the peace in the early years after the transfer of the territory from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion. But conditions beyond human control suddenly changed the whole complexion of the life of the Indian and half-breed population of hunters. The disappearance of the buffalo deprived them of their essential means of livelihood, and they suddenly found themselves dependent upon the charity of the government. The aid was generous, but its distribution was of necessity coupled with galling restric-

tions. Treaties confining each Indian tribe within a certain defined area were accepted with reluctance, or sometimes refused, as in the case of Big Bear. All this made ready listeners for Riel with his grandiose plans and promises. In the midst of it the Mounted Police soon found themselves nearly helpless.

It was natural and necessary for the sake of unity of action that the Mounted Police should be placed under the commander-in-chief along with all the other forces. But in the use of the Mounted Police General Middleton showed throughout great lack of understanding of their character and of the desperate situation with which they were suddenly confronted. Their strength was hopelessly inadequate for doing what he blandly expected of them. The foolishness of his orders was repeatedly apparent. His persistent stubbornness in the matter of the relief of Battleford, for instance, led at last to his hand being forced in an embarrassing way through a direct appeal to Ottawa by Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney, who knew the seriousness of the situation as Middleton did not.

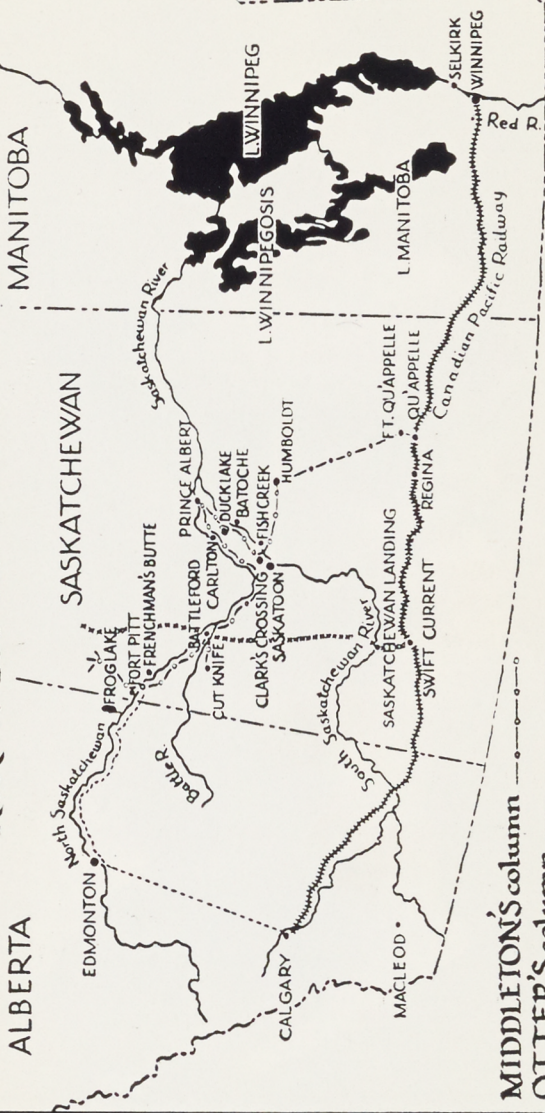
Speaking of his general plan of campaign, Middleton says: "I proposed sending at once [i.e. to Battleford] a reinforcement of Mounted Police under Lieutenant-Colonel Herchmer, from Regina". This statement can hardly be reconciled with what he says later.: "On this and the following day (April 2) I received rather alarming news from Battleford, the mounted police officer in command there being evidently a pessimist, and from what I could gather, I did not believe Battleford was in any such danger as he described, but I telegraphed to Lieutenant-Colonel Herchmer at Regina to hurry to Battleford with his party of mounted police and one mountain gun." Thus it was only after repeated calls for help that he consented to do even as much as this. But he should have known that his



order to Herchmer could be nothing but a joke. Herchmer just refused to obey it, knowing that he could not then get across the South Saskatchewan River, and that, even if he could, his little force of 50 men, only 25 mounted, and impeded by the wagons necessary to carry food and fodder, would be massacred by Poundmaker's Indians long before it traversed the 200 miles to Battleford. To see how far Middleton was from a proper appreciation of the situation, it is only necessary to note that on the very day of his reluctant order to Herchmer, Big Bear's Indians at Frog Lake massacred nine friendly civilian whites, forcing Captain Dickens and his little detachment of Mounted Police to evacuate Fort Pitt and save themselves by a hurried and perilous journey down the Saskatchewan to Battleford. The news of Riel's victory at Duck Lake exactly a week earlier had travelled quickly, with results that showed the people cooped up in the stockade at Battleford what they might expect. Already Poundmaker's Indians and half-breeds had made two attempts to gain possession of the place by a treacherous ruse, which was only foiled by the alertness of Inspector Morris. And the Battleford Mounted Police had been reduced to a mere handful of 18 by the despatch of most of them to the assistance of Prince Albert. It was not until 11 days later still (April 13) that Middleton, listening to an appeal by Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney who had referred the matter to Ottawa, finally ordered an adequate force—Otter's column—to proceed to the relief of Battleford.

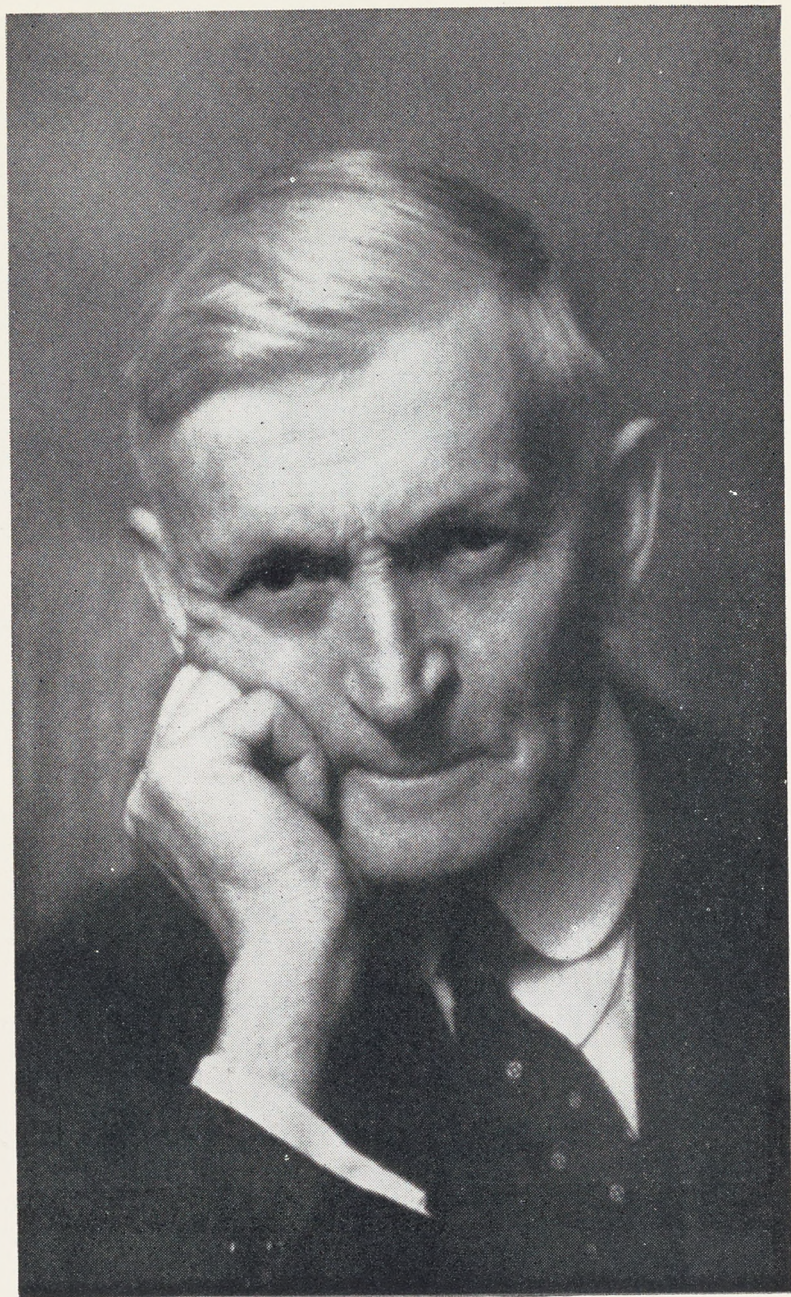
After the loss of 12 of his force at Duck Lake, Major Crozier hurriedly evacuated Fort Carlton as no longer tenable, destroyed it, and retired to Prince Albert. The junction of his force with that of Colonel Irvine put Prince Albert in a fair condition to defend itself against a possible attack by Riel, though even its fate hung

# AREA OF MILITARY OPERATIONS in the NORTHWEST REBELLION OF 1885



MIDDLETON'S column  
OTTER'S column  
STRANGE'S column





*G. H. Needler*



in the balance until Middleton's troops loomed up. Colonel Irvine at least was sure that his force was not large enough to warrant his moving out from Prince Albert to attack Batoche, as Middleton wished him to do; on the contrary, he urged the General to come to his aid before launching the attack on the rebel headquarters. Between the two there was a stalemate. But Colonel Irvine at Prince Albert did indirectly help Middleton, as he remained a potential menace which Riel and Dumont could not quite disregard.

The situation at Battleford, even after Captain Dickens arrived safely from Fort Pitt, was, however, quite different from that at Prince Albert, and vastly more perilous. Middleton's Battleford figures are loose and misleading. The combined Mounted Police force there totalled only 43 men. There were, in addition, 45 volunteer Battleford Rifles and a Home Guard of 134 imperfectly armed residents of that district. The weakness of the place was due to the fact that of the 567 persons cooped up there, 365 were non-combatants, mostly women and children. Inspector Morris's insistent appeals for help, in view of what had just happened at Frog Lake and Fort Pitt, were not just the panicky calls of a "pessimist", but were fully warranted by the facts.

Even when General Middleton had come up to Battleford after disposing of Riel at Batoche, he continued to air his often quite faulty judgments. Otter and his column had saved the place. And, though he had exceeded the commander-in-chief's general order by attacking Poundmaker, he had made it impossible for the two big Indian leaders, now openly on the war-path, to unite forces with Riel. The massacre of the American General Custer and 264 men by the Sioux Indians of Dakota under Sitting Bull a few years before



and the movement of this redoubtable chief with a considerable band across to Canada, where some of them ultimately joined Riel, had made the Indian menace on our side of the border a more real one to be reckoned with.

Writing of what had happened at Battleford Middleton says: The Indians "burned and pillaged some of the houses the night of Lieutenant-Colonel Otter's arrival". This is nonsense. On the night before the column arrived (April 23) Poundmaker's Indians, knowing this was their last chance, did stage a particularly lurid scene of burning and pillage. But the riot of destruction had begun on March 29, nearly four weeks before, and continued without interruption. They did not burn up the Old Town in a night or two, as they might have done. A big bonfire of a store or residence with accompanying dances and war-whoops was fun worth prolonging; so they kept it going for 26 days, for the delectation of the owners who looked on helpless from the fort beyond the river.

General Middleton's original plan of campaign was simple. From the base at Qu'Appelle on the C.P.R. he would lead his main column against the halfbreed headquarters at Batoche on the South Saskatchewan not far from its junction with the north branch. At the same time Major-General Strange, starting from Calgary some 500 miles farther west, would lead a second column on a much longer journey north to Edmonton and down the North Saskatchewan against an enemy chiefly Indian. The two columns were to converge at Fort Pitt for combined operations against the Indian chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear, Middleton having already disposed of Riel at Batoche.

Though he stubbornly resisted any change in this simple strategy, Middleton was pushed into an import-

ant modification of it. He had intended to move Colonel Otter's column of over 500 men down the left bank of the river parallel to his own on the right bank in the attack on Batoche. But, on April 13 (11 days before Middleton's first clash with Riel's forces) Otter's column was ordered to hurry north from Swift Current to the relief of Battleford. The large reduction in the strength of his main column did much to hamper Middleton's own operations; and when he was foolish enough to persist in his tactics and threw half of his reduced force across the river to take the place intended for Otter, he came near to disaster in the first encounter with the rebels at Fish Creek. But the advance was soon resumed and Batoche was finally overrun. Middleton with his main column reached Battleford and received the surrender of Poundmaker, with whom Otter had had a fierce encounter at Cutknife Hill; then he did finally unite with General Strange at Fort Pitt, Big Bear's force was scattered, and the fighting was virtually over.

General Middleton was handicapped in being the representative of a system that had already been discredited by his predecessors and was destined soon to pass away. After the time of confederation in 1867, a chief relic of colonialism was the custom of appointing an officer of the British regular army to be commander-in-chief of the Canadian militia. Of the two men who had held this post before Middleton, the first was only a partial success, the second a distinct failure. Though there were in 1885 no longer any British regular troops serving in Canada, the lack of sympathy, if not actual antagonism, between the appointed British regular at the top and the Canadian militia as a whole was inherited by Middleton. And when the Rebellion of 1885 came on, his preference for British regulars, or at least for those who had seen imperial service, was



glaring and distasteful. Nor can we, I think, fail to detect a considerable element of snobbery in his appointments. Good discipline repressed all but a few open expressions of resentment at his partiality, but resentment was none the less widespread. All told, Middleton presents an unfortunate contrast with Garnet Wolseley who 15 years before led a mixed force of British regulars and Canadian militiamen to restrain the aberrations of the same Louis Riel, and in so doing won the intense and lasting loyalty of both.

But of the much greater campaign of 1885, it can still be said that all's well that ends well. It is recognized that considering the difficulty of organizing a very inadequately trained militia for a sudden emergency of such magnitude and the terrible obstacles of weather and distance that had to be overcome, the suppression of the insurrection in the short space of four months stands out as a very creditable feat. Much as we may criticize details in the generalship of the commander-in-chief, the end was success.

## MILITARY OPERATIONS BEGIN

Three weeks or so before actual firing began at Duck Lake rumblings of an approaching conflict had become so plain as no longer to be neglected by Ottawa. On March 3 Louis Riel called half-breeds to arms on the Saskatchewan River, and on March 17 proclaimed a provisional government with Batoche's Crossing as his capital. To resist this menace the 90th Battalion of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Field Battery were called out on March 23, and on the following day General Middleton left Ottawa to take charge of operations in the west. The first firing took place on March 26 at Duck Lake, when Major Crozier, with a small body of Mounted Police augmented by some volunteers, moved out from Fort Carlton to secure some Government stores, and was ambushed by the rebel forces and compelled to retreat with a loss of 12 men. Seeing that Fort Carlton was no longer tenable Major Crozier destroyed it and retired to Prince Albert to join the Mounted Police there under Colonel Irvine.

A few days after reaching Winnipeg General Middleton decided to make Qu'Appelle on the C.P.R. his base of operations and moved troops from Winnipeg to take possession there. On March 27, the day after the Duck Lake fight, orders went forth from Ottawa for the mobilization of troops all across Canada. In



spite of the almost insurmountable difficulties faced by the troops from the east in passing the unfinished stretch of the C.P.R. along the North Shore of Lake Superior, in the space of ten days the Queen's Own Rifles and the 10th Royal Grenadiers with some smaller units from Toronto were on the scene of action, at the disposal of General Middleton at Qu'Appelle. The Lake Superior region had presented the builders of the Canadian Pacific Railway with engineering problems as difficult as those in crossing the Rocky Mountains. The trials of this part of our journey westward have already been alluded to; and I can feelingly confirm that account as one who passed through them 72 years ago. I may perhaps be permitted to speak personally for a moment and say that in those days the University of Toronto—that is, practically University College—supplied a complete company to the Queen's Own Rifles, an association that had existed since before the Fenian Raid of 1866. I joined this ("K") Company in 1882, my freshman year at college, and when the Rebellion broke out in 1885 had reached the dizzy rank of corporal. About 4 a.m. on Saturday, March 28 (which was my nineteenth birthday) I was aroused and had to scurry round and see that my squad of seven men were on parade at the Armouries (then down on Church Street below the St. Lawrence Market) at nine o'clock. Just the senior half of each of the eight companies of the battalion were taken along, being joined to form four companies for the active service. The choice and reshuffle were soon made. The rest of that Saturday, the Sunday and Monday forenoon were a busy time of preparation, and by 12:30 we were off on the C.P.R. train. There being at that time no line straight north from Toronto, we went east to Carleton Place and then up the Ottawa valley as far as the rails were laid. At Carleton Place Edward



Blake, William Mulock and other members of Parliament came over to give Colonel Otter a passing greeting. (One thing vividly remembered is that Mr. Mulock loaded the Varsity boys with enough tobacco to keep them in smokes till the close of the campaign.) "End of steel" was reached about where Chapleau station now stands. And here I would like to emphasize this. For recently one of our professional historians, in his otherwise excellent one-volume history of Canada, has the startling announcement that we reached "end of steel" at Regina! The fact is, we reached end of steel just an even 1,000 miles this side of Regina. It was relatively child's play laying the C.P.R. rails across the great central plain, and before we started trains had already been running on the unbroken line from Nipigon out to the Rockies. There never was an "end of steel" at Regina. On such an assumption the plan of military operations just doesn't make sense.

Well, with "end of steel" transportation difficulties began in earnest. How get across the four big gaps in the next 300 miles of the unfinished C.P.R.? A good meal at the construction camp about 11 p.m., and then we climbed aboard the bobsleighs that were assembled to take us over the first gap of 40 miles. There was no road; the teams just ploughed their way through the deep snow, into which we upset more than once. A wonderful if not restful ride it was through the moonlight night, with the mercury at 25 below. By late afternoon the teams had hauled us to rails again. Ahead was now a stretch of 90 miles of rails. The construction flatcars had been boarded up about four feet at the sides, and board seats ran lengthwise inside. It was just at dusk that we climbed on board, a bright full moon and twinkling stars again, with the same 25 below zero. Needless to say, with the open sky overhead, the air-conditioning was



faultless. Huddled together with two army blankets apiece to pull up over our heads we kept from freezing, and were glad to see the sun rise. About 10 a.m. we had a snack in the snow and marched down to begin a hike of 22 miles across the ice of a Lake Superior bay. The going was not easy. The sun softened the surface of the snow just enough to spoil the footing and make you slip back a little at every step. Added to this was the glare of the sun on the bright snow as we headed westward. With wise forethought Colonel Otter had provided against this possibility by having goggles issued, just the horn frames without glasses, which helped somewhat. In spite of this our eyes were strained nastily. I remember that Major Allen's were so swollen that one was completely closed up, and the other nearly so.

Next came flatcars again for 45 miles, then 27 miles in bobsleighs, once more flatcars for 52 miles, after which a hike of 11 miles across the ice, and the last gap was passed. At Red Rock near Nipigon, colonist cars and an unbroken C.P.R. ahead! Such was the "North Shore", the greatest of our physical trials in the whole campaign, and all the more severe for unhardened men just a week out from the city. But somehow we got through the four sleepless nights and hard going by day. Only one plucky chap, trying to tough it out, went off his head and had to be sent home.

We blessed the real cars that now took us 800 miles westward for the opportunity they gave us of catching up with sleep. We were at Winnipeg most of April 7, then on through Brandon where the good townsfolk held us long enough for welcome, evening refreshments and coffee, and early on April 8 Qu'Appelle was reached. Here we left the train, and tents were pitched for the first time. This was the point chosen

by General Middleton as his base for operations northward against Riel at Batoche.

As we have seen, the relief of Battleford, far up on the North Saskatchewan among the Cree Indians, had become imperative. This duty was assigned to Colonel Otter who with his whole force moved farther west to Swift Current, from which point the trail leads north to Battleford. With General Strange assembling another force at Calgary, the campaign has now developed into the operations of these three columns northward from a 500-mile stretch of the C.P.R.—Middleton's main column from Qu'Appelle against Batoche, Otter's from Swift Current to the relief of Battleford, and General Strange's from Calgary to Edmonton and down the Saskatchewan.

Middleton began by taking possession of the ferry at Clarke's Crossing. This ferry was just a cable from shore to shore along which a scow, swung below it with pulleys at the proper angle, was driven to and fro across the stream by the force of the current. With amazing misjudgment Middleton persisted in the obsession that half of his force should be thrown over to the left bank of the river, when the sole means of doing this was by this slow and untrustworthy cable ferry. He set about planning the crossing at once. The left column, under Lord Melgund (later Earl of Minto, Governor-General of Canada) numbered 373, Middleton's main column 440. The two columns were to keep opposite to each other as they marched down, the scow with the cable on board dropping down at the same rate. As a matter of fact it did not maintain its proper position between the two columns. When it was needed to recross the left column in the critical emergency of the Fish Creek fight, it had to be waited for for some time. In Middleton's own words: "When it did arrive, the unwieldy scow, instead of having the



assistance of the wire rope and the current, had now to be laboriously propelled with oars roughly improvised . . . the current being an obstruction instead of an aid. Added to this was the difficulty of embarking and disembarking, owing to the deep mud, boulders and blocks of ice, and to the absence of a wharf and roadway down and up the steep wooded banks some 100 feet high on each side". And yet he did divide his force, leaving the two halves dependent on such a connecting link!

Moreover, he planned to do this before he had, or knew that he could have, any means of signalling from column to column. Strange to say, in his whole force up to this date there was no unit of signallers. Fortunately I can now tell in minute detail how he sought to meet this imperative need.

Through a letter kindly written to me by Captain John Slatter I am able to add a note to those I had to make in my edition of General Middleton's history of the campaign correcting erroneous statements made by him.

Captain John Slatter, M.B.E., V.D., is remembered with admiration and affection as the famous bandmaster of the 48th Highlanders of Toronto, a post which he held for 50 years, 1896-1946. In his earlier years he had served throughout the campaign of 1885 with Middleton's column as a gunner in A Battery, Permanent Force. Naturally cognizant of the daily routine, he was surprised to read the General's incorrect account of an episode in which he himself was the person primarily concerned.

When Middleton decided—very unwisely, as the event proved—to divide his force and advance on Batoche with half of it on each side of the river, it was necessary to establish a system of signalling from

column to column across the stream. Here Slatter tells how this was done.

"I was particularly concerned on reading on page 30 about the Bugle Signalling, because I was the Bugler. The account given is *not correct*. I presume General Middleton had forgotten the true details.

"The story is very simple. The night before the crossing, April 21, a clause in general orders (there being no signallers in any unit) asked any man who knew signalling to report. I was the only man to report to my Captain Peters, who marched me to the General's tent in the morning. General Middleton asked me where I had learned signalling. I told him as a band boy in the British Army. In those army days, band and gunner boys were the regimental signallers. General Middleton explained he intended sending over to the left bank a Column under Straubenzie with Lord Melgund as Chief of Staff, and asked me how quick I could instruct others in the Morse Code. I told the General if he could have the flags made (I gave him the colours and size and design) and with stiff cardboard I would write out the dots-dashes, and be ready by two o'clock that afternoon. Going back with Captain Peters to our own A Battery lines, I selected Bugler Bridges and Sgt. Grant, who soon progressed sufficiently to send the messages, slowly of course.

"The General with his staff, taking me with him, went across by the scow at two o'clock and contacted the signallers without any errors. That evening the column under Straubenzie crossed over. I was attached to the Winnipeg Battery".

Though the signalling system was thus instituted so nicely by Slatter, we get a jolt when we find General Middleton say: "We were unfortunately unable to



use our bugle signalling, as I could spare neither Captain Peters nor a bugler". (Page 36, footnote.) This statement is at the close of his account of the fight at Fish Creek, where the rebel forces had stalled him completely, and indeed created a critical situation. The buglers whom Slatter had coached so quickly were not there to send an urgent order to the column on the left bank to cross back. In Middleton's words, "They saw somebody on our side gesticulating and shouting. Melgund went down to the riverside, and though he could not make out clearly what was said, he rightly understood that they were wanted to cross, and immediately set to work to do it". In the panic someone not authorized by Middleton had taken it upon himself to send the message. We need no further evidence to show that Middleton got a serious setback at Fish Creek. This might have been avoided and probably a decisive victory achieved, had he kept his whole force on the right bank and thus had enough men to turn the enemy's flank.

In his account of the establishment of the signalling system Middleton writes: "During the day we tried a system of signalling between the two columns by bugle notes, long and short, suggested and carried out by Major Jarvis, commanding the Winnipeg Battery, and Captain Peters, commanding A Battery, which proved a perfect success". As is seen by my previous quotation from Middleton, when the serious crisis arose the system received no opportunity to function at all.

We see now how and by whom the bugle signalling system was established. What are we to think of the commanding officer, who, in telling of it in his written history, does not even mention Gunner John Slatter, the one man upon whom it all depended?

Captain Slatter adds this general comment: "Should

there ever be issued a second edition of this work, I would respectfully suggest the need of many corrections and additions to General Fred Middleton's account of the 1885 campaign".

Slatter's last signalling duty was in November at the hanging of seven Indians at the Police Barracks in Battleford. When his Battery was later under tents at Moose Jaw on the C.P.R., and the first official train came through from Montreal, about April 12, they turned out to salute Sir Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona).

On April 24 the first real fight of the campaign took place. This was at a point some 17 miles below Saskatoon, where a small stream called Fish Creek enters the Saskatchewan River on the right. The deep ravine through which the creek flows formed an ideal defensive position for the rebel force under Gabriel Dumont, a hardened hunter and trapper, whom we have to think of always as director of the military efforts of the rebels; Riel himself carried a crucifix. It was a hot set-to at Fish Creek in which the enemy definitely stopped Middleton's advance and made a desperate attempt to turn his right flank. Here was a commander-in-chief with under 400 men actually engaged and 373 idle on the other side of the river! Late in the afternoon Melgund with a company of the 10th Grenadiers managed to get across and into the action. The tide was turned; Dumont and his men withdrew toward Batoche. But only after inflicting 50 casualties, 10 killed and 40 wounded.

This fight at Fish Creek took place on April 24, and, though Middleton was not defeated, so serious was the setback that he could not resume his advance on Batoche until May 9, two weeks later. But he had learned his lesson. The obsession of a force on each



side of the river at last left him. There is something illogical and unconvincing in his effort to save his face: "I now decided to reunite my force . . . Melgund had never liked my plan of dividing the force which—though I believe it, as regards the enemy, to have been a good one—I now saw was more suitable for a force of regular troops than for a body of perfectly untried and almost untrained militia, however willing and plucky they might be".

Leaving General Middleton awaiting reinforcements and supplies at Fish Creek with his force reunited on the right bank of the river, let us now move some 180 miles westward on the C.P.R. to Swift Current, from which point Colonel Otter set out on April 13 to the relief of Battleford 200 miles to the north.

Otter's Battleford column was composed as follows:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Northwest Mounted Police (25 mounted, 1 gun) | 50    |
| "B" Battery R.C.A. (2 guns)                  | 113   |
| "C" Company, Infantry School Corps           | 49    |
| Governor-General's Foot Guards               | 51    |
| Queen's Own Rifles                           | 274   |
| Scouts                                       | 6     |
|  | <hr/> |
| Total of all ranks                           | 543   |
| Wagon Train (200 wagons)                     | 202   |

The prevailing vivid memory that has remained with me over these years is of the immensity of the whole setting of nature which we were invading, a boundless horizon of prairie. In that April of 1885 winter lingered nastily in the lap of spring. The patches of snow that still dotted the vast expanse made the scene a desolate one. The transcontinental railways south of the United States border, and now our own C.P.R., had effectually stopped the annual

up and down migration of the hordes of buffalo that used to graze there; but on all sides we could see hundreds of bleaching bones to remind us of what their presence until recently meant to the Indian hunters. And the deep-worn paths to the drinking-places were still there. But in spite of lingering snow patches the millions of crocuses that studded the prairie floor assured us that spring was at hand.

Our column on the march was like a great two-mile serpent winding its way along; coiled to rest at dark and uncoiled again at dawn. When we tented overnight the ground was moist and the frost enough to make it necessary in the morning to lift our rubber sheets with care from the frosty ground to which they clung. Tent pegs were firmly frozen in. By the afternoon of the second day out we reached the South Saskatchewan, where we had two nasty days of cold and rain waiting for the sternwheel steamer *Northcote* to ferry us across.

It happened that I was corporal of the three-man corporal's guard needed to complete the protective ring around the force on a chilly night of waiting at Saskatchewan Landing. A man to post on sentry go every hour meant that sleep for the corporal was quite ruled out. That night I had time to reflect that, though a corporal was something above a private, the two stripes were not all comfortable glory.

It was April 17 when the steamer turned up to ferry us across. We had snow as we struck tents next day at noon and got on the move north again. On the 19th and 20th we marched through a barren and treeless stretch of prairie. This meant no wood for cooking, no meat, no water. Dried apples to chew moistened the palate a bit and helped down the hard-tack, our only food.



Obstacles on our march to Battleford were negligible. Poundmaker's scouts, who of course knew of our every movement since we left Swift Current, kept out of the way of a big force. A physical obstacle that we encountered one day, though not dangerous, may be noted as offering a bit of variety:

We came to Eagle Creek one day to find it  
For wagons perilously near too deep;  
Of course the Scouts and Mounties didn't mind it,  
We hikers couldn't take it at a leap:  
Clothes doffed, held high, we waded the chill tide,  
Danced off the shivers as our pelts we dried.

On the 23rd we were on the march at 5:45 a.m., and by five in the afternoon were within three miles of Battleford. Colonel Otter, however, deemed it wise not to advance farther with darkness coming on. That night the Indians had a final go at burning, and the light that we could see over the skyline was from Judge Rouleau's house going up in flames. They had all fled to safety as early next morning, April 24th, we entered south Battleford, our immediate relief mission happily over. Needless to say, the 567 people, most of them women and children who had fled for their lives to the stockaded Mounted Police Barracks and been cooped up there for three weeks, were pleased to see us.



*Colonel Otter*





*General Middleton*

## THE FROG LAKE MASSACRE

The victory of the rebels at Duck Lake, where they killed 12 of a mixed force of Mounted Police and volunteers and compelled the evacuation of Fort Carlton, was the electric shock that aroused Ottawa to action. Murdering of whites began up in the west, where the Cree Indians were now openly in alliance with Riel. Just a week after the Duck Lake fight Big Bear's band massacred nine peaceful civilians, including two priests, at Frog Lake above Fort Pitt. To Captain Dickens, who was stationed with a little band of two dozen Mounted Police at Fort Pitt, this was sufficient warning of what he might expect, and he hastily made off in a leaky scow for Battleford, 90 miles down the river. He arrived there safely on the morning of April 22, just two days before the place was relieved by Otter's Column.

Captain Francis Jeffrey Dickens was the third son of the great novelist Charles Dickens. After nine years of service in India he had been invalided home. For a change of climate he was gazetted to the North West Mounted Police in 1875, the year after the establishment of the force, and had thus been in it for ten years at the outbreak of the Rebellion. He resigned his commission in 1886 and died in that year when visiting friends in Illinois.



News of the Duck Lake fight reached the camp of Big Bear, 200 miles away, about a week later. It was the signal for a most brutal outburst of Indian savagery, the massacre of nine civilians at Frog Lake above Fort Pitt. Mr. W. B. Cameron, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, was the only man to escape, and that by a very narrow margin. He lived on as a prisoner with Big Bear's band till hostilities were over, and has given us in *The War Trail of Big Bear* a minute account of this horrible event. The revel of murder over, two forlorn women, Mrs. Gowanlock and Mrs. Delaney, were each dragged to the tent of a cruel Indian brute who had joined in the murder of their husbands. But before nightfall they were rescued by the chivalry of two halfbreed gentlemen, whose names will live, John Pritchard and Adolphus Nolin. Pritchard "bought" Mrs. Delaney with two horses. In the case of Mrs. Gowanlock they engaged a young man named Pierre Blondin, who had worked for Mr. Gowanlock, to negotiate the purchase, for which they supplied the price. He succeeded in buying Mrs. Gowanlock for a horse and \$30. The two women were brought together to the tent of Pritchard and his family. From then on, through the weeks of wandering as prisoners with Big Bear's band, they were under the watchful care of Pritchard and Nolin, who risked their lives to save them. They survived the terrible ordeal and with other prisoners were released on the dispersal of Big Bear's band. (It so happened that Mrs. Gowanlock and Mrs. Delaney, both of Toronto, came down from Fort Pitt to Battleford by the same steamer on which I was serving as one of the escort party.)

In his story, which is not only of thrilling interest but is written in a charming style, Mr. Cameron represents Chief Big Bear as a fundamentally humane man, well disposed to the whites. A bad son and un-

controllable associates perpetrated the murders, for which they paid with their lives on the scaffold. In the closing trials at Regina Mr. Cameron pleaded the case of Big Bear.

It should be noted here that the alliance of our Canadian Indians with Riel was motivated not a little by the achievement of the famous Sioux Chief Sitting Bull and his followers a few years before in massacring 264 American troops and their commander General Custer in Dakota. After that great victory Sitting Bull took refuge in Canada, where a temporary settlement was assigned them on the Saskatchewan River near Saskatoon. A total of some 4,000 Sioux came over. They failed to make a living by agriculture as they were encouraged to do. They made some raids back across the border and became a nuisance and an unwelcome responsibility to the Canadian government. Sitting Bull was finally pushed back over the border in 1881, five years after the Custer affair. Some of his band under Chief White Cap, who remained behind, joined Riel, under compulsion, they said. After Riel's defeat White Cap and some followers were held by Colonel Denison at Humboldt for eight weeks. Denison formed a high opinion of White Cap, and at the close of the campaign, with General Middleton's approval, gave him his liberty. Later, when White Cap was arrested and placed on trial at Regina along with some others Colonel Denison chivalrously protested to the Minister of Justice, and the case was dismissed.

Stimulated by the success of Sitting Bull, the Indians of several of the mid-western American states leagued together in the determination to keep their lands from being taken away from them by the ruthlessly advancing whites. They formed a society under the name of Ghost Dance; in their religious frenzy, the members



believed they could communicate with their dead relatives. Sitting Bull was not himself one of the ecstasies, but he was looked upon generally as the great chief of all the Indians and a menace to peace, and the American government decided to remove him. With difficulty they succeeded in arresting him in his lodge in the middle of the night, in December, 1890. In the ensuing scuffle in which his friends sought to rescue him he was killed.

Louis Riel's immediate followers were principally French half-breeds, but he committed the unpardonable crime of deliberately inciting the Indians of our Canadian Northwest to join him in a general crusade against the whites. Favorable conditions led them to accept Riel as the Messiah who was to deliver them.

## THE LONE CANOEIST OF THE SASKATCHEWAN

The chronicle of '85 would not be complete without the story of the remarkable feat of Surgeon-Major C. M. Douglas, V.C., in making his way to Saskatoon to take charge of the Field Hospital established there.

Born in Quebec, Mr. Douglas had joined the British army and attained a high position on the medical staff, chiefly by service in India, where the Victoria Cross was conferred on him. On retiring he came to Canada and settled in 1883 at Lakefield, Ont., on the Otonabee river above Peterborough. When rebellion broke out in the Northwest he offered his services to General Middleton and was asked to take charge of the field hospital at Saskatoon. Question: How get from Lakefield on the Otonabee to Saskatoon on the Saskatchewan over 2,000 miles away? He was able to dodge the horrors of the North Shore that we had to face, and travel by way of Chicago and St. Paul to Winnipeg and on to Swift Current on the C.P.R. From this point he had to go overland 18 miles to Saskatchewan Landing, where he hoped, vainly, as the event proved, to find a passage from there to Saskatoon by the steamer *Northcote*.

Colonel Douglas was an ardent canoeist, and at Lakefield had had a folding canoe built for him on an im-



proved model designed by himself. The little craft was 12 feet long. When the ribs were released, each side of the canoe folded lengthwise along the keel, making it compact and easily portable. The canoeman sat in it with a doublebladed paddle, kayak style. This tiny craft he took along with him from Lakefield; but I think he can hardly have seen himself tempted to make the dangerous trip of 200 miles down the Saskatchewan. It turned out that this was the only way of getting to Saskatoon to take over his post as the head of the Field Hospital there.

To begin with, the drive with pony and buckboard up to Saskatchewan Landing was something of a thriller. As he dismounted to adjust his load, letting the reins out of his hands, the wild pony bolted and after galloping about on the prairie was only caught by some teamsters well down on the trail toward Swift Current. But Saskatchewan Landing was finally reached. (From here on I will quote the story as far as possible in Colonel Douglas's own words.)

"Next morning shortly after daybreak I got my gear together, stowed it in my little craft, and started on my lonely paddle of over 200 miles [The Steamer *Northcote* for which he had waited did not put in an appearance]. The river was free from ice but had not been reinforced as yet by melted snow from the Rocky Mountains, so the water was low; the stream ran between sandbanks at the rate of two to three miles an hour, and its depth was variable . . .

"My outfit consisted of a couple of bags of provisions, hard biscuit, tinned meat, and a little tinned fruit, tea, cocoa and sugar (altogether enough to last me a fortnight), blankets, a waterproof sheet, and a small tin pot for cooking. I had no tent, proposing to use my canoe for the purpose of shelter after the manner of the North American Indians.

"Helped by the current I paddled at the rate of about five miles an hour . . . At first I thought of an Indian lurking behind each thicket. After I had passed a good many without seeing any Indians I felt more at ease . . . Desolation is the chief impression I have carried away of the South Saskatchewan . . . To find the channel at times was the only difficulty. The river wound among the sandbars in a way that was confusing, and unless I watched carefully the set of the current I would suddenly find myself with only about two inches of water under my keel. Occasionally I was tempted to make a short cut, which was not a success as I was soon reduced to wading barelegged through sand and water for about a quarter of a mile before I regained the main channel.

"At noon I stopped for a modest dinner of corned beef and hardtack, and a short rest . . . By the afternoon of the second day . . . a hard wind got up, and as I found I was not making much headway against it I camped for the night . . . I selected a dry coulee when there was one handy, by the river if possible, spread my bag and blanket on the ground for a bed, and over this I turned my canoe bottom upwards like an umbrella, one gunwhale resting on the ground, the other supported a foot or so above it by a short stick. Over the canoe and opening I spread a large waterproof sheet, so as to extemporize an effective shelter tent, beneath which I crept and covered myself up. Even toward the end of April the nights in the northwest of Canada are sometimes intensely cold, and occasionally when I woke in the morning I found my waterproof sheet stiff with ice. My supper and breakfast consisted of cocoa and biscuit.

"On the morning of the third day about seven o'clock I reached the Elbow, where the river changes its course from northeast to north . . . As soon as I had



got well on my way northward I met a stiff breeze blowing right up the river . . . I hammered against this for a short time, but soon came to the conclusion the game was not worth the candle, and accordingly made for the shore, landed and built a small fire, at which I read and slept the rest of the day and night.

"I was up betimes the following morning, for at about three a.m. the temperature of my lair under the canoe was not conducive to sleep. Relighting my fire I soon made myself a cup of cocoa, which with hardtack constituted my frugal breakfast, then I got under way again just as the dawn was breaking. The morning was fair and calm, and helped by a strong current I made good headway down stream.

"After paddling about 20 miles I was somewhat startled by the unexpected boom of a steam whistle lower down the river. Following the windings I soon came in sight of the smokestack of a steamer, without doubt the *Northcote*. Was she on her return voyage, or was she on her way down stream like myself? A few more strokes of my paddle settled it. I saw the red-coated line of the militia soldiers, and rounding to under the lee of the steamer which was wedged on a sandbar, was greeted by a cheer from them. I spent a few hours on board the steamer, but soon tired of the monotony of seeing the ship, heavily loaded, with two barges alongside, warped or lifted from one sandbar to another by means of her 'grasshopper legs'. So after dinner I launched my canoe again and left the *Northcote* as I had found her, stuck on another sandbar . . .

"As I got near the Moose Woods, where the river widens out to two or three miles from one bank to another—the current passing between sandbanks and islands — wild geese, *outarde*, Canada wild swan and ducks became more plentiful; these were so tame I came up within a few yards of them; evidently canoes

were a rarity on the river. I forebore shooting at them with my revolver (the only weapon I had) on account of the uncertainty of hitting a goose or duck with it; besides, I had no cartridges to spare. A herd of antelope also came down to the river bank about 200 yards from me, gazed for a moment, then trotted off. Beaver splashed into the water from the bank, put their heads above water to gaze around, and then treated me to a view of their tails. About sunset I got to the expansion of the river and paddled on, hoping to find a suitable camping place, but they were rare in that locality. At last, as the evening darkened into night I put to shore, climbed up a low muddy bank on which to build my fire. Tired with my long day's work I slept soundly in spite of the hard frost.

"Next day — the sixth from leaving Swift Current — was the last of my cruise. Making an early start I paddled past an Indian reservation allotted to a band of Sioux who had crossed the line from the United States side after the dispersion of Sitting Bull's tribe, accompanied by that redoubtable chief. The band, headed by the chief 'White Cap', had abandoned their reservation and gone off to join Riel, leaving their huts and implements of agriculture which had been given them in the vain hope of changing the nature of these wild men.

"After about 20 miles paddling I got to where the river narrowed again, and where an island split the current in two; the prettiest bit of river scenery I had met with. Below this I came on an inhabited house on the bank, near which were two boys watching me. From them I learned I was close to the colony of Saskatoon, a small settlement on the river, where I was expected, as my departure had been wired from Swift Current. Two or three miles lower down I came on a ferry, and landing there I carried my canoe and lading up to the ferry-



man's house. The village was in a state of commotion, a fight between Canadian Militia and half-breeds and Indians had taken place a week before about 30 miles lower down the river, and some 30 wounded men were to be brought in that afternoon. So I had other work than paddling to do, and my solitary cruise came to an end."

\* \* \*

If there is not a permanent memorial of some kind erected to Surgeon-Major C. M. Douglas, V.C., at Saskatoon, there should be. His was surely an exploit which for daring, skill and determination to fulfil an assumed duty it would be difficult to find a parallel anywhere.

The story, to which I supplied an introduction, was printed in the Hudson's Bay Company's magazine *The Beaver* in June, 1950. An article in *Forest and Stream* of July 9, 1885, and another in the *Badminton Magazine* of April 21, 1897, had already made it known.

\* \* \*

It was expected that the 40 men wounded at Fish Creek would be transported up on the steamer *Northcote* for proper hospital attention at Saskatoon. But, as we see, the steamer was stuck on sandbars. After some weary waiting ambulances of a kind were improvised by stringing ropes from side to side of empty wagon-boxes, and on them the wounded men were carried. By a sort of fortunate miracle the distinguished Surgeon-Major Douglas reached Saskatoon in his canoe the morning of the day on which they were brought in.

## CUT KNIFE

It was in high spirits that on the early morning of April 24 we ended our hasty 200-mile march. There suddenly spread before us an immense two-river scene, — the smaller Battle river down below us and away beyond the great Saskatchewan, whose waters were soon to meet. Lying between them was the V-shaped plain on which stood the stockaded fort of the Mounted Police, where weary people had anxiously awaited our coming. But on that day the beauty that nature spread before our eyes was rudely marred by the doings of men. Old Battleford, grown out of the trading post established by the Hudson's Bay Company on the south side of the river, was a total wreck; houses and stores looted and burned, and what could not be carried off strewn about in disorder. The one-time Government House, now turned into an industrial school where the rising generation of Indians were being coaxed into the white man's way of living, still stood there, but with the interior smashed, beds ripped open, and little volumes of the gospels in Cree strewn about among the feathers. I even picked up a volume of Dickens among the mess. (I was not yet aware that a son of the great novelist, a captain of the N.W.M.P., was a few hundred yards away.)

Colonel Otter had been at Battleford only a few days when he decided that Poundmaker should be



called to account for the devastation and murders that his men had committed.

Otter had not General Middleton's permission to do this, but telegraphed to Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney on April 26 as follows: "I would propose taking part of my force to punish Poundmaker, leaving 103 men to garrison Battleford. Great depredations committed, immediate decisive action necessary. Do you approve?" Dewdney approved, and the expedition was undertaken.

Poundmaker's camp lay 35 miles to the west of Battleford, and could be reached by a good trail more or less parallel to the Battle River on its south side.

Now Otter had Colonel Herchmer of the Mounted Police, Inspector Morris and Battleford people perfectly familiar with the district to supply him with what one would think was complete information about Poundmaker's position. Among them they should have been able to make the best guess as to his mood and conduct, his force and all the rest. That the Indians were on the alert and aware of every movement of troops could be taken for granted. It was impossible to take Poundmaker by surprise. Otter travelled through the night and timed himself to reach Cutknife Hill at dawn and thus have a whole day for any operation against Poundmaker if a clash should take place. The force that he took with him was composed as follows:

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Northwest Mounted Police (50 mounted)     | 75 |
| "B" Battery R.C.A.                        | 80 |
| "C" Co. Infantry School Corps             | 45 |
| Governor-General's Foot Guards            | 20 |
| Queen's Own Rifles (with Ambulance Corps) | 60 |
| Battleford Rifles                         | 45 |

1 Gatling Gun

2 Seven-pounder Guns

Total of all ranks

325

48 Wagons

As I have a full, frank and finally authoritative account of what happened at Cutknife that day at my disposal, I will simply quote it verbatim. This is copied from the *Diary* of Lieutenant R. S. Cassels of the Queen's Own Rifles, which is preserved in the Library of the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto.

Friday, May 1.

"The object of the expedition is, we hear, to make a reconnaissance. It is not thought that there will be any fighting to do, and, if there is, Poundmaker has with him only 200 men and ought not to be able to do very much. The Brigadier and staff evidently think that Poundmaker would surrender if we get near him at all.

"About 4 p.m. the Column starts. [Details of its composition.] We have some 50 wagons and push on rapidly till nightfall. [Rest till moon rises. Poundmaker's camp some 35 miles off, we hope to reach it by dawn.] There is, of course, no chance of surprising him. His scouts have probably long ere this noticed our advance, for signal fires have been burning all afternoon on the distant hills, but we must reach him before he has time to move off.

"In the early dawn we reached Poundmaker's reservation . . . About half past four we came to a wide open plain and found that there had evidently been a very large camp . . . The scouts searched some clumps of bush that were nearby . . . In front of the camp and quite close to it was a large creek, and rising from it on the far side were high hills intersected with numerous ravines. . . . [When it was quite light] we could



see far away on the distant hills a herd of cattle grazing and one or two mounted men riding about. Here evidently were our friends. As they were at least two miles away it was decided to cross the creek, climb the hill and have breakfast and rest the horses before pushing on. The stream proved to be rather hard to cross. After crossing it we had some 500 yards of scrubby marshy land to go through, and then we began to climb the hill. The scouts were riding quietly near the guns, the men had dismounted and were walking by twos and threes along the trail when suddenly, just as the scouts reached the top of the first steep ascent, I heard a rattle of rifles ahead, and then in a minute or two saw the Police and some artillery lying down firing briskly over the crest of the hill, and the guns and Gatling also working for all they were worth. At the same time bullets began to fly around us and puffs of smoke floating from the bushes on the right and left showed where they came from. Evidently we were in a trap. The men fortunately had their rifles in their hands, and it was the work of a very few moments to form up and take the positions assigned to us. And this was the situation. Roughly speaking we occupied a triangular, inclined plane, the apex resting on the creek and the base running along the crest of the hill. In front of the hill and parallel to the crest was a ravine about 200 yards distant, and running down from the ravine on each side of us and in a direction pretty nearly parallel to the sides of the triangle was another ravine. On the far side of the ravine on the right there was open ground, but on the left for a long distance the whole country was rolling and bushy, and it was from this side that the heaviest firing seemed to come. "C" School was ordered to protect the right flank and clear the ravine on that side, while to the Queen's Own and Guards was assigned a similar duty

on the left. The Battleford men were to look after the rear. The Police and Artillery were heavily engaged in front.

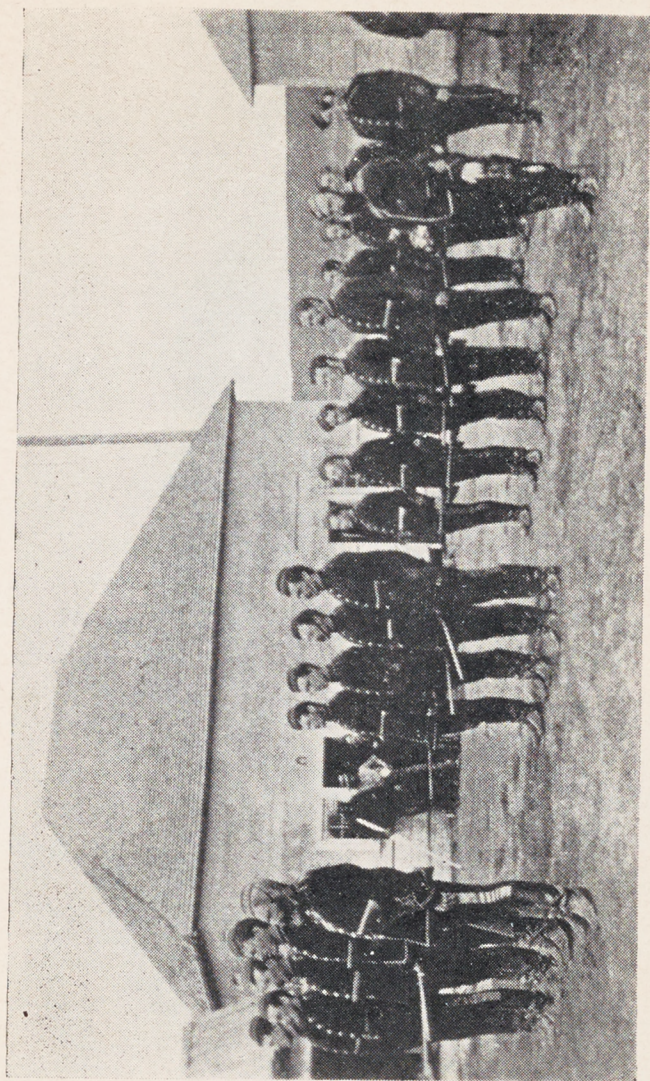
"This was at 5:15 a.m. As to what happened after that, except in my own immediate vicinity, I know nothing but by hearsay. I saw no more of the Guards, Battleford Rifles and our fellows till we were on our way home.

"For half an hour we had quite hot enough weather, and the bullets came flying about us in a not over pleasant manner. We were exposed to fire from three sides and had to grin and bear it. After half an hour or so we had quite silenced any fire on the right, that is our own immediate front, and could easily keep the ravine clear, as the Indians could not reach it without exposing themselves, and this they never dared to do. Colonel Otter asking how things were and being told this, ordered Mr. Wadmore to take the men up to the front and reinforce the line there, and at the same time he asked me to take a couple of men and carry some ammunition to the fighting line. While doing this I had a chance of seeing how things were going on. The wagons, I found, were formed in a square in a dip in the ground, the horses fastened to them, and the Mounted Police horses formed in a corral a short distance from the wagons. So far no men near me had been hit, but I heard the cry of "ambulance" several times, though too busy to notice particularly where or why the cry was raised. Now, sad to say, I saw only too well why the bearers were needed. A small square was formed with wagons, and here Strange and Lesslie were busily engaged. Several poor fellows were lying there that needed no further looking after, but others were having wounds bound up and being made as comfortable as was possible.



"We got the ammunition and carried it across the exposed places as quickly as possible and reached the guns and the front of the line. Here the fighting is still hot and several men are hit, but gradually the fire on our front slackens, and bullets come in any quantity from the left. There the Queen's Own are evidently having plenty of work: the rattle of rifles is unceasing. Where I am the Gatling is worked wherever there appears to be a chance, and every now and then the guns throw a shell or two at the enemy. Unfortunately we have with us the Mounted Police guns, the small howitzers, and they prove to be utter failures. In the first place they are not heavy enough, and in the second place they are not even in working order. After the first few shots the trails went to pieces, and before any further shots could be fired the guns had to be fastened as best they could with ropes. Very little could be done with guns in this condition, but all that could be done was done by Major Short and Captain Ruth-erford. Their pluck and coolness was in striking contrast to the miserable skulking spirit shown by the French-Canadian gunners, who 'funked' decidedly and were of no use whatever. Major Short and one or two men worked one gun by themselves and made some beautiful long shots at the teepees which could be seen about a thousand yards away and at the groups of horsemen who supposed they were out of all danger. I stayed with the guns for a considerable time till Colonel Otter and Colonel Herchmer decided we could not advance and must retire. This was about 11 a.m. The fire of the enemy seemed to be almost completely silenced, but it was thought that we could not advance without great loss through the broken country in front of us, in the face of an evidently numerous foe. The wagons and guns were to be taken across the Creek, and the Gatling, Artillery and "C" School were to





*Captain Dickens and his Company*





*Sitting Bull*



stop on the hill to cover the retreat. I ran across to rejoin "C" School who were now on the right front, and gave Mr. Wadmore the order. I found that while I was away one poor fellow had been shot dead, having been hit in three places, as he exposed himself to fire.

"Between 11:30 and 12 we got the order to retire, and then came the most trying time of the day. We had got about 300 yards from the crest of the hill before the Indians knew what was up and appeared on it, but then a heavy fire opened on us, and mighty hard work it was to walk quietly down with the bullets whistling by. The men behaved however with great coolness and steadiness, and the Artillery and ourselves retired alternately 50 yards or so at a time, then halted and kept up a steady fire. The Gatling was now near the Creek and opened on the Indians, and Captain Rutherford sent some shells among them from the far side and they evidently felt they had had enough. They did not attempt to follow us past the creek, and this we crossed quietly, the men with admirable coolness, each waiting his turn to cross the stream by a log that lay across it, and refusing to gain time by wading through the water.

"Across the Creek we found everything prepared for a start, and we got in our wagons without delay and made off.

" . . . We drive for about an hour and then stop and water the horses and have something to eat, and not before we need it. We have had nothing since last night and are about exhausted now that the excitement is over. After a short rest we press on and reach Battleford about 11 p.m."

I remember well the rattle of the wagons as they came within hearing on their return that night. They



brought with them five dead men, who were laid on the ground not far from my tent till next morning. Another casualty could not be found as they left Cutknife, but was brought in next day. Two of the badly wounded men died, making a total of eight killed in the action. There was no confusion or panic at the news. Guards were strengthened, and within a day or two a row of rifle-pits was dug from river to river on the west side of our lines, as a precaution against a follow-up attack by Poundmaker. This never took place. A large tent was erected to serve as a hospital for the wounded. These included G. E. Lloyd, a tent pal of mine, to whom I lent my revolver and a few rounds to stick in his pocket as they set out. What became of it I never heard.

The number of fighters Poundmaker had at Cutknife was given by Father Cochin, who had lived among them, as 380 braves and about 40 half-breeds. Besides these there were 200 old men and boys who remained in the camp. The priest thought we had had a wonderful escape, as the Indians had surrounded us entirely. Early in the day the Indians made a rush for the guns and nearly had them. The Artillery fell back at first, but were soon rallied by Major Short. Father Cochin does not know how many Indians were killed. He buried five of his own people, and there were others besides.

An incident of the Cutknife fight deserves to be recorded. E. C. Acheson and G. E. Lloyd were two of the Queen's Own men who peppered away to keep the Indians below the crest of the ravine on the left. When Acheson saw that a Battleford man near him had been hit—mortally, as it proved—he asked Lloyd to try to cover him while he went forward to haul the wounded man back to the ambulance. Lloyd told me afterwards that he thought he did put a bullet through

an Indian who exposed himself in trying to get a good shot at Acheson. Lloyd then dropped his rifle and ran out to help Acheson. He was just stooping to take hold of the wounded man when he himself was hit. The bullet entered low on the right side of his back, passed across his body and came out at the left shoulder. It kept under the skin all the way, and by a sort of miracle didn't touch the spine. The worst part of the wound was the infection from shreds of clothing that were carried in by the bullet. Lloyd himself was in due time carried safely in, a casualty for the rest of the campaign. On recovery he was made Chaplain of the Queen's Own, with the rank of Lieutenant. He was a Wycliffe College student at the start, a tent-mate and member of my corporal's squad. He ended as Bishop of Saskatchewan.

Acheson, after marrying a member of the Gooderham family of Toronto, moved to Connecticut, where he also became a bishop. He was the father of Dean Acheson, President Truman's Secretary of State. A brother, Arthur Acheson, who searched with us for Big Bear, later achieved fame for detective work in the search for the Dark Lady of the Shakespeare sonnets.

Now that we have the facts of Cutknife in all their grim simplicity, what shall we say of this attempt to chastise the great Indian Chief?

In the first place, it is hard to believe that Colonel Otter and Colonel Herchmer and their other Battleford informants could be such simpletons in their estimate of Poundmaker. Far from there being any surprise, while Otter's force were making their night journey in wagons Poundmaker had silently placed a cordon of his men at the edge of the ravines all along the three sides of the triangle described by Lieutenant



Cassels. Otter's scouting as they walked into the trap was certainly lax, and the discipline of the Indians perfect as they kept in hiding until the whole force was in it. It seems incredible that they could think there was not an enemy nearer to them than Poundmaker's camp, about two miles farther on, till all of a sudden bullets began to fly at them from Indians in ambush just a matter of yards away. Otter got the shock of his life. But he kept cool and his men kept admirably steady as he threw a line of them facing the ravines all round the open space. His only safety lay in delivering such a hot fire as to compel the Indians to keep under cover.

But this did not get him out of the trap. The Indians could hold him there all day. It was utterly impossible for him to advance out to Poundmaker's camp by the narrow trail through bush at the far end. Six hours of hot firing brought that no nearer. There he was, faced with the desperately disappointing decision—retreat. The handling of that movement puts Otter foremost among the commanders of the whole campaign.

The story is already told.

## B A T O C H E

Though Dumont and the rebel forces had been compelled after the critical events at Fish Creek to withdraw and concentrate on the defence of their headquarters at Batoche itself, they had definitely stopped Middleton in his advance. He was stalled there for two weeks waiting for reinforcements and supplies, so that it was May 7 before he could go forward once more.

After waiting in vain for the steamer to take the 40 wounded men up to Saskatoon they had been sent off on the 17-mile journey in wagons on which they were made as comfortable as possible by make-shift ambulance devices.

It was the steamer *Northcote*, as we know from Surgeon-Major Douglas who passed it in his canoe, that had to spend these days chiefly in the struggle to release itself from the sandbars of the Saskatchewan. We can imagine the feelings of the troops on board who had to put up with the galling delays. These were two companies of the Midland battalion under their commander Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur T. Williams; the American Howard of the Gatling company who had joined the Canadian force to try out the new machine gun; and Lieutenant-Colonel Van Straubenzie, soon to be appointed commander of the Infantry Brigade.



The fighting at Batoche was a four-day set-to, May 9 to 12: first a definite check of Middleton's force, and finally a charge that swept away the rebel opposition. Dumont fled and got away across the border to safety in the United States. Riel gave himself up three days later.

Those who wish details of the four days of fighting for Batoche may find them in General Middleton's own account, which I follow closely here. And it would be wise to temper them with some comment by Colonel Denison who was able to gather information at first hand.

The definite repulse by the rebels on the first day gave food for serious thought. It is to Middleton's credit that he decided to stick it out there in spite of the opinion of most of his senior officers that they should retire. That the situation was critical is clear from his account: "I thought it wise to prepare for possibilities, and wrote orders to be sent by telegraph from Humboldt, to close up the troops in our lines of communication, so as to be at hand if required. I also wrote a despatch to the Minister of Militia on the state of affairs, which I determined to send by Lord Melgund. He was naturally averse to leave me, as I was to lose him at such a moment, but I explained to him my reasons for wishing it, and he departed that afternoon on the understanding that I was to telegraph to him at Winnipeg if matters became worse, and he was then to return with any troops he might find there."

Things were far from satisfactory when a commander found it necessary to send off his Chief of Staff with a message to Ottawa so personal and important that it could not be entrusted to the telegraph. On his way out Lord Melgund reached Humboldt next morning before Colonel Denison was up. Asked what news

he had from the General, he lowered his voice so that the sentry should not hear him and said: "Well, it is not good." "What," said I, "surely he has not been defeated?" "No," he replied, "but he has had a check. He tried to drive the enemy out but could not succeed, and he has fallen back a little way and formed a defence with his wagons, and there they are. Some thought he had better retreat, but it was considered that that would have a bad moral effect, and he has determined to stick it out." On the next morning, May 10, Middleton says: "I moved out part of the infantry; but we were not able to take up our position of yesterday, as the enemy was in greater force and now held the high ground."

May 10 and 11 were spent in sparring for advantage. On the morning of the 11th, with Boulton's scouts and the gatling, he reconnoitered round the right flank onto the open plain to the north of the village and drew enemy fire from a line of rifle pits they had made in expectation of attack on that side. Middleton decided to make a general attack next day, the 12th. With this end in view he made a stronger threat from this side again with all his mounted men, a battery of artillery, and the Gatling gun, having arranged with Van Straubenzie before starting that, as soon as he heard them well engaged, Van Straubenzie was to move off and push on toward the village. As soon as Middleton had drawn the enemy to the rifle pits he was to gallop back and join Van Straubenzie in the attack.

When he got back to the camp he found to his intense surprise and annoyance that, owing to a strong wind blowing toward him, his firing had not been heard and the infantry had not moved out of camp. In his anger he rashly hurried off alone to see what the enemy was about, and got into such a hail of bullets



that he had to run for it and drop into one of his own rifle pits, from which he finally got back to camp unhit. "By this time the men had had their dinner, and I directed Van Straubenzie . . . to push on cautiously while the rest of us had something to eat."

"Van Straubenzie moved off and extended two companies of the Midlanders on the left moving up to the cemetery. The 10th Grenadiers under Lieutenant-Colonel Grasett prolonged the line to the right beyond the church, the 90th being in support. The Midlanders, gallantly led under their Colonel, swept on through the wood, driving the enemy out of the rifle pits at the cemetery and between the cemetery and the river. The 10th, under their gallant chief, Grasett, now advanced, driving the enemy out of the ravine, the whole giving vent to a rattling cheer which brought myself and staff speedily to the front, where I found the whole line, which had been splendidly led by Lieutenant-Colonel Van Straubenzie, in the wood facing the village, the line being perpendicular to the river; the Midlanders on the left, the Grenadiers in the centre, and the 90th on the right in column. . . The guns were now up and commenced firing from the old position on the village and on the ferry, by which some of the enemy were escaping. The 90th were now quickly extended to the right of the Grenadiers, the extreme right being taken by the scouts, dismounted. . . Soon, with the officers well to the front, a general advance of the whole line was made with rousing cheers, the place was captured, the prisoners released, and the fight was over, except for some desultory long-range firing, which was soon put down by two or three parties sent in different directions. . . I sent for our blankets and food, and bivouacked in and about the houses of the village."

Persistently hopeful of river navigation, Middleton

had had the steamer *Northcote* barricaded and a party of men put on board to drop downstream and fire as they went. But, as usual, things went all wrong. The ferry cable across the river carried away the steamer's smoke-stack and steam whistle, and in the two miles of drifting, no damage was inflicted on the enemy, and little received. Lower down some damages were repaired; but on the way up the steamer ran on sand-bars, and was too late to be of use in the fight.

Batoche was the climax of the rebellion of 1885. With the scattering of the half-breed forces and the capture of Riel, the campaign was virtually ended. There was no uncertainty as to what followed. And this being the case, we can join in the general rejoicing without stopping to think too critically of the part played by the General commanding on the final deciding day, May 12. But even the uninitiated layman will find it hard to believe that all-important communication between two parts of his force that were to combine for a final attack could be left by the General to depend on the strength or direction of a wind that might be blowing.

And we must give credit where credit is due. The heroic charge that won the day was made, not on an order from Middleton, but by two Canadian officers weary of inaction, acting on their own. These were Colonel Arthur T. Williams with his two companies of Midlanders, joined immediately by Colonel Grasett and the 10th Grenadiers. The bold rush was made "while the rest of us [that is, General Middleton and his mounted men] had something to eat." Colonel Denison tells us: "I have heard the story from men who followed close to him [Colonel Williams]. He had his revolver in one hand, his cap in the other, and he ran about 400 yards across the open under the



fire from the houses in the village, straight at one of the central houses 20 yards ahead of everyone, and never looked back to see if his men were following him till he ran up to the side of the house between the windows, and leaning close against the wall, to be out of range of the windows, he looked back and stood to get his breath. . . The reinforcements came up just in time to take part in the final rush. Then they all went on through the village and drove the rebels for several miles in utter rout."

The rebel losses at Batoche were estimated at 51 killed and 173 wounded, nearly all in the last day's fighting. Casualties in the troops for the four days amounted to 8 killed and 46 wounded. Victim of almost the last shot fired was Captain French, organizer and leader of his efficient body of Scouts. When the final charge was under way, Captain French entered a house and ran up to obtain a better view from an upstairs window; there he was taken off by a bullet from one of the retreating enemy.

Despairing of saving himself by flight as Dumont had done, Riel gave himself up after three days. General Middleton says of him: "As soon as Riel arrived in camp he was brought to my tent while one was being pitched for him next to my own. I found him a mild spoken and mild looking man, with a short brown beard and an uneasy frightened look about his eyes, which gradually disappeared as I talked to him. He had no coat on and looked cold and forlorn, and as it was still chilly out of the sun I commenced proceedings by giving him a military great coat of my own. He spoke English perfectly and I had a long talk with him. He told me that he had intended escaping to the United States with Gabriel Dumont, but finding troops all about in the woods, he had given up

the privations he would have had to undergo in trying to escape, not being accustomed to a hunter's life as Dumont was.

"After conversing with Riel a good deal for two days, I came to the conclusion that he was sane enough in general every-day subjects, but he was imbued with a strong, morbid, religious feeling mingled with intense personal vanity.

"After giving him some dinner I sent him off to his tent, and placed him under the personal charge of Captain Young, the Brigade-Major, who never let him out of his sight until he had handed him over to the police authorities at Regina."

## THE RED CROSS AT BATOCHE

Shocked by the horrors of war a Swiss Citizen, Henri Dunant, devoted himself to the organization of an international society to aid the sick and wounded. This was achieved through a conference of representatives of the European nations held at Geneva in 1864. In the following year the resolutions adopted there became international law. The Red Cross Society was established. It chose as its emblem the Swiss flag reversed, the red cross on a white ground. A British Red Cross Society was formed in 1870. But it was only in 1896 that a Canadian branch came into being, chiefly through the energetic crusading of Dr. George Sterling Ryerson of Toronto. Dr. Ryerson was surgeon of the 10th Royal Grenadiers in the Riel Rebellion of 1885. While the battle for Batoche was in progress, he had a spring wagon drawn by two horses in which the stretchers and other medical equipment were carried. He says: "To distinguish it from ordinary transport I made a flag of factory cotton and sewed on it a Geneva Red Cross made from pieces of Turkey red which I got from the



ammunition column. This was the first Red Cross flown in Canada, and is now in the J. Ross Robertson historical collection in the Central Public Library in Toronto." This first actual use of the Red Cross flag in Canada to mark the position of an ambulance took place, then, 11 years before the formal establishment of the national Canadian Red Cross Society.

## BATTLEFORD AND FORT PITT

The final sweeping victory at Batoche on May 12 suddenly made General Middleton's difficult task a simple one. With the half-breed forces utterly routed there remained only the two big Indian chiefs, Poundmaker and Big Bear, to be called to account. And upon news of the capture of Riel the more formidable of the two, Poundmaker, at once sought terms of surrender.

During the next few days a great number of the defeated Riel forces, carrying some sort of white flag, came in and gave themselves up, most of them being given their liberty upon surrendering their arms. Middleton did what he could to relieve the distress of the people of Batoche by placing food for distribution in the hands of Roman Catholic priests.

The troops were soon crossed over the river and moved on to Prince Albert. On May 22 the force, except the mounted men and transport who marched, was embarked in two steamers and headed upstream for Battleford. On the 23rd a canoe shot out from the bank alongside the steamer with an Indian and an interpreter bearing the following note from Poundmaker:

EAGLE HILLS, MAY 19th, 1885

"Sir, I am camped with my people at the east end of the Eagle Hills, where I am met by the news of the



surrender of Riel. No letter came with the news, so that I cannot tell how far it may be true. I send some of my men to you to learn the truth and the terms of peace, and hope you will deal kindly with them. I and my people wish you to send us the terms of peace in writing, so that we may be under no misunderstanding, from which so much trouble arises. We have 21 prisoners, whom we have tried to treat well in every respect.

His  
(Signed) Poundmaker X  
Mark

To Major-General Middleton,  
Duck Lake

"I sent back the following not quite grammatical answer," writes Middleton.

"POUNDMAKER—I have utterly defeated the half-breeds and Indians at Batoche, and have made prisoners of Riel and most of his council. I have made no terms with them, neither will I make terms with you. I have men enough to destroy you and your people, or, at least to drive you away to starve, and will do so unless you bring in the teams you took and yourself and councillors, with your arms, to meet me at Battleford on Monday, the 26th. I am glad to hear you have treated the prisoners well and have released them.

(Signed) Fred Middleton,  
Major-General

Middleton arrived on the 24th at Battleford, where he was received by Colonel Otter. The day being Sunday, the celebration of Queen Victoria's birthday was postponed till Monday, when a parade of all the troops took place. This, as I remember, included a *feu de joie*, rather jerky, to be sure, but no doubt duly edifying to

scouts of Poundmaker viewing the scene from the heights across the Battle river.

On the 26th, in accordance with Middleton's demand, Poundmaker came in to surrender. Lieutenant Cassels tells of his arrival thus:

"Ere long the renowned Cree Chief appears before us . . . Captain Hughes and myself receive the braves at the gate of our fortress with becoming dignity. Poundmaker is accompanied by some 15 sub-chiefs and councillors, and the appearance of the band is very picturesque and striking. The Great Chief himself is a very remarkable-looking man: tall, very handsome and intelligent-looking, and dignified to a degree. He wears a handsome war-cap made of the head of a cinnamon bear, with a long tuft of feathers floating from it, and a leather jacket studded with brass nails and worked with beads, long beaded leggings coming up to his hips, and brightly coloured moccasins, while over his shoulders hangs (?) a very gaily coloured blanket. The others dressed in much the same manner, and all are elaborately painted. Poundmaker shakes hands with us without dismounting or uncovering. But all the others get off their horses and take off their caps before they approach us. After a short talk we send the party on to the General."

(We might recall here that this same Poundmaker was the prominent Indian chief who in 1881, just four years before, courteously responded to the invitation to escort the vice-regal party of the Marquis of Lorne and the Princess Louise across the plains from Battleford to Calgary.)

Here is Middleton's own account of the meeting:

"On the 26th, Poundmaker and his people came in about 1 p.m., and we held a 'pow-wow' in front of the camp. It was rather an interesting sight. The Indians

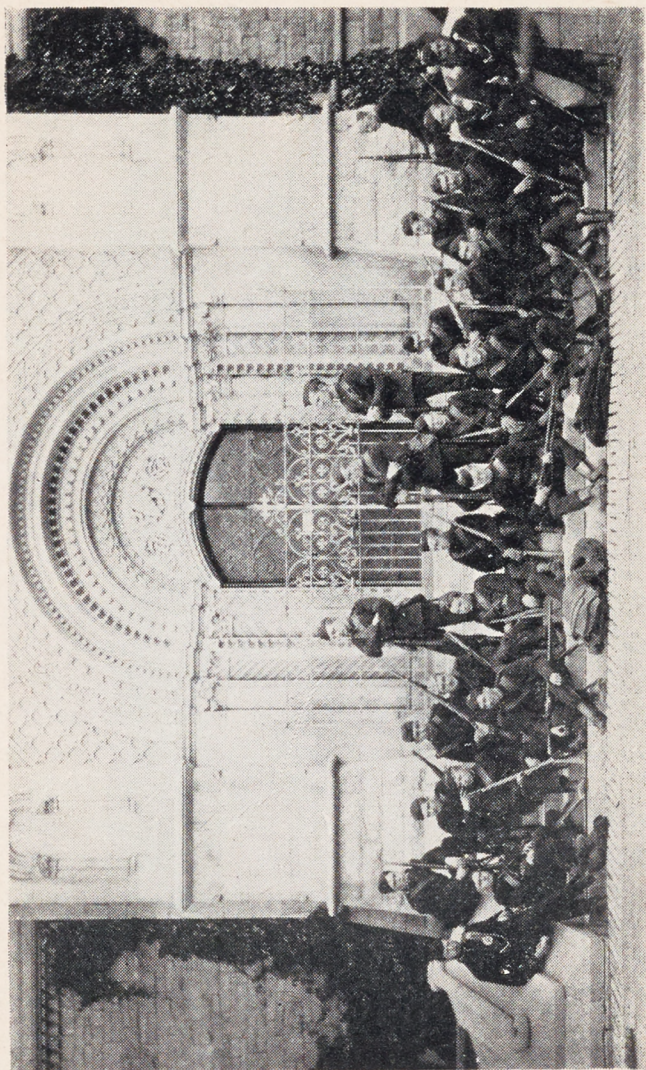


in war paint, to the number of about 70, squatted themselves down in a semicircle in front of my chair, Poundmaker, a tall, fine-looking Indian taking up his position between the Indians and myself, Hourie, my interpreter, standing close to Poundmaker. Outside the semicircle were to be seen a few squaws, squalid and dirty as usual. Close round me, in a semicircle to match the squatting Indians, stood all my officers, the whole completely encircled by the men of my force.

“Poundmaker opened the ball by making a long oration, embellished with allegories and the usual Indian flower of speech. The gist of it was that he knew little of what was going on, that he had done his best to keep his young braves quiet, and that now he had come to make his peace, which he seemed to think was very praise-worthy of him. Several braves followed him, but it was difficult to understand what they were driving at. At last a squaw came forward and wanted to make a speech, but I objected, saying that, like the Indians themselves, we did not admit women to our councils in wartime, and that I could not listen to her. When this was translated to her the dirty, but crafty old woman shrewdly remarked that we ourselves were ruled by a woman. In answer, I allowed that such was the case, but pointed out that our gracious Queen only spoke on war matters through her councillors, among whom were no women. The old lady did not seem to see it, and she was dragged away, grumbling loudly, by some of her friends. Poundmaker kept dignified silence during this little interlude.

“After the braves had all finished I made a short speech, in which I pointed out the ingratitude of the Indians, who had been well treated by the white men, in joining the half-breeds in rebellion, and that now, when they heard of the defeat and capture of Riel, they came in with lies in their mouths begging for peace.





*The Varsity half of No. 4 Company*





*Poundmaker*



I then went on to say that, in obedience to an order from the Government, I should arrest Poundmaker and four of his braves, bearing the curious names, when translated, of Lean-man, Yellow-mud-blanket, Breaking-through-the-ice, and White Bear, and that the rest could return to their reserve, first giving up the men who had committed two deliberate murders of white men a short time before. Upon this, a brave wearing a European woman's straw hat with ribbons, stepped out of the semicircle, and, sitting at my feet, which he grasped with his two hands, confessed to one of the murders. Strangely enough, this man's name, when translated, was "the man without blood". Another Indian now stepped out, and, stripping himself to the waist, advanced and confessed to having committed the other murder. I then declared the pow-wow at an end, and the prisoners were taken off by the Mounted Police, and eventually sent to Regina."

It was a tragic and a pathetic scene that we looked upon that bright May day by the Battle River. It ended the major clash at arms between red men and whites on the North American continent. Here was written finis to the freedom of a great Indian Chief and Hunter of the Plains. After the stern words had been spoken a posse of Mounted Police in a few moments led a broken-hearted but still dignified Poundmaker, with his four designated councillors and the two confessed murderers, to the guardroom of the Battleford barracks. There I saw the chief at close range, as more than once my turn came to be a member of the strong guard that was constantly posted over the group until they were sent off to imprisonment at Regina. We did our little best to make him comfortable as he lounged and smoked there during the days of weary waiting. In the end, be it noted here, Poundmaker and Big Bear were sentenced to three years imprisonment. They were re-



lased after a year, but survived only a short time the loss of liberty.

It was fortunate that among those who witnessed the surrender of Poundmaker, this memorable event in our Canadian history, was a skilful artist; Major Rutherford has depicted the scene beautifully. His painting is preserved in the Public Archives in Ottawa.

The long trail that we had followed on our march to the relief of Battleford was a vulnerable line of communication. This was evident when Poundmaker's Indians grew more daring in their raids after the repulse of Otter at Cutknife. On May 14, about 15 miles south of Battleford, they captured a train of supplies, of over 20 wagons, and not only made a fine haul in food but took the teamsters prisoners. (These are the men referred to in the exchange of notes between Poundmaker and Middleton.) On the same day they attacked a Mounted Police patrol of nine men, killing one man and wounding another. The blame for the loss of the supply train must be placed squarely on the shoulders of General Laurie, whom General Middleton had put in charge of the base at Swift Current. He never should have allowed wagons to venture over that trail without a very strong escort. This was the only episode of its kind during the campaign.

## STRANGE'S COLUMN

We have to turn now to the operations of Strange's column, the Alberta Field Force. In the three-column plan for the campaign as a whole Middleton assigned to General Strange the task of attacking Big Bear from the west. This meant the longest route of all, first the overland march of 200 miles from Calgary to Edmonton, and then the journey of 300 miles on or alongside the North Saskatchewan River from Edmonton to Fort Pitt. At the latter place Middleton, having disposed of Riel at Batoche and Poundmaker at Battleford, was to join forces with Strange for the elimination of Big Bear. As we shall see, however, Strange, acting on his own, had lamed Big Bear's force before Middleton's arrival at Fort Pitt.

It was a fortunate chance that such a man as General Strange was available for this difficult task. Strange was an artilleryman who had a long and distinguished service record behind him, largely in India, where he had known Middleton. In 1871, then a Colonel, Strange was appointed Inspector of Artillery for Canada, and Commandant at the Citadel of Quebec. In 1881, after 30 years in the Royal Artillery, he was placed on the retired list with the rank of Major-General.

Strange presents in every way a striking contrast to Middleton, under whom he was now to serve in the



suppression of rebellion in western Canada. Middleton was an example of the hidebound British regular, who found it difficult to deviate from professional routine, and who was accordingly severely handicapped in his co-operation with officers and men of the Canadian militia. Strange, on the other hand, through his long association with Canadians, could on occasion throw routine and red tape to the winds.

Technically, and according to regulations, too old to be a soldier, he took to ranching and founded the Military Colonization Company with a ranch of 70,000 acres 50 miles southeast of Calgary on the north side of the Bow river. Here he was still able to take a hand in all the rough-and-tumble of broncho-busting, cattle-branding and herding that goes with life on the ranch. He was a near neighbour of the Blackfoot Indians on their reserve only ten miles away. He made a point of getting on intimate terms with their famous Chief Crowfoot, who solemnly swore brotherhood with him. "A dark Duke of Wellington in features," Strange calls him, "with something of the level-headedness and shrewdness of the Iron Warrior." This goodwill of Crowfoot meant everything to Strange in his organization of the Alberta Field Force; though Indians, even Blackfoot braves, will be Indians when there are horses to be stolen from a nearby ranch. General Strange with his cowboy style and dress was known to his men out there as the "Buckskin Brigadier". But he himself retained to the end another nickname, "Gunner Jingo", which had been attached to him in his early artillery days, when the music-halls were ringing with

"We do not want to fight but by Jingo if we do,

We've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too."

Anyway, when General Strange came to write his auto-



biography, he labelled it "Gunner Jingo's Jubilee". His lengthy account in this book of the share of the Alberta Field Force under his command in the campaign of 1885 is an important document in our Canadian history. I have now to give the gist of it.

Three days after the Duck Lake fight Strange received from the Honorable Adolphe Caron, Minister of Militia, the following telegram: "Can you get up corps? Would like to see you to the front again. Trust you as ever. Arms and ammunition will be sent up upon telegram from you."

By April 20 he started with his column, and reached Edmonton on the 30th.

But before this real start could be made, endless obstacles had to be cleared away. Red tape so delayed the fulfilment of Government promises that at one point Strange in anger called for reimbursement of expenses already incurred, and he would disband the corps as far as already formed. But in the end he got a force together. A heartening nucleus came at once into being through the eagerness of the cowboys on the ranch to join up. Even some sporty Americans came in, and did not balk at taking the oath of allegiance to Her Britannic Majesty. Strange was pleased also to see so many men turning up who had been trained by himself when he was instructor in artillery at the Military College. His column was made up of Mounted Police and Mounted Scouts; Infantry, 65th Voltigeurs of Montreal (300 men) and 160 men of the Winnipeg Light Infantry; supply and transport equipment and medical outfit. The column was divided into three sections, which followed on as transport became available.

The march from Calgary to Edmonton was one of terrific difficulty and hardship. No sooner had they started than a snowstorm came on that lasted two days.



Muskegs had to be corduroyed and brushed, even new roads cut through the woods; the French Canadians were very skilful at this work.

And it must be remembered that the general situation out in Alberta was dangerously threatening. Riel's emissaries had been at work stirring up the Indians all through the Northwest, and it was impossible for Strange, with his small force, to guard adequately his long line of communications. After what had happened at Duck Lake and Frog Lake, the people both of Calgary and Edmonton were in real danger, and kept imploring General Strange not to leave them unprotected. We must remember, too, that these places were in 1885 far from the flourishing towns they now are. They were merely tiny posts in what was still the Great Lone Land. How to dispose of his forces all along the line was an ever present problem for the commander. But in the end he reached Edmonton without serious molestation, making the 200 miles through the wilderness in ten days!

Preparations for the downstream journey of the column took two weeks. The start was made on May 14. Fort Pitt, the objective assigned by Middleton, was reached on the 26th, and two days later, on May 28, General Strange had a heavy engagement with Big Bear at Frenchman's Butte.

In novelty and variety this combined land and river movement presented difficulties that called for all the ingenuity of the resourceful commander. The two weeks at Edmonton were taken up with loading the scows with a huge supply of provisions for the troops and the horses. The scows too, had to be put in a state of defence against enemy fire from the river banks. Barricades of barrels of salt pork and beef, topped with sacks of flour with loopholes for firing, were placed round the edges of the big scows.

Provisions were to be had in barely sufficient quantities in Edmonton owing to the fact that Hudson's Bay stores in the district had been looted by the hostile Indians, and people driven in from outlying farms. Even a storm of snow, wind and rain postponed the embarkation of the troops for a couple of days.

The flotilla, which in the end amounted to eight boats, with a Hudson's Bay pilot on each, proceeded in the following order: five Infantry boats, each containing a company with camp equipage, ammunition and food supplies; one gunboat with an artillery detachment, N.W.M.P., nine-pounder gun and ammunition; one horse barge with forage and the gun team; and one ferry-boat scow, with stores and a coil of wire rope sufficient to span the river, creating a ferry that enabled the troops to act on either side of the river. River scouts in canoes preceded the flotilla. Even cooking was done on board, in small sheet-iron stoves.

On land the Mounted Scouts under Major Steele led the way. The 65th Voltigeurs and the Winnipeg Light Infantry marched on each side of the river, taking turns at occasional rides on the scows. As the wagons were gradually emptied of forage they were used to lighten the march by giving some of the infantry a lift.

At Fort Saskatchewan, which was passed on May 15, many refugees were found in tents within the palisades of the Fort. The old Hudson's Bay post at Victoria was put in a state of defence and a detachment of the 65th left as garrison. On the way were found considerable supplies of barley and potatoes abandoned by the Indians, some of which could be taken along. On the 24th the Column camped near Frog Lake, and celebrated the Queen's birthday.

General Strange quotes from H. B. Cameron's ac-



count of the Massacre at Frog Lake, giving the names of the Indians who did the killing.

Fort Pitt was reached on the evening of the 25th. The fort, which, as we know, had been evacuated by Captain Dickens and his little detachment of Mounted Police, was cleaned up by Strange's men, to be put in a state of defence. Among the debris left by the Indians was the mutilated body of a Mounted Policeman. His heart had been taken out and stuck on a pole!

General Strange had now made his way right into the territory of Big Bear. With a perfect knowledge of the rugged country and with a band numbering probably 700 fighting men, this famous chief who held out longest of the Indians, had chosen a position of wonderful defensive strength for a stand against the troops threatening him from the west. He was situated on the far side of a wide bush-covered valley through which flowed a sluggish stream; behind it rose a considerable hill known as Frenchman's Butte.

A little preliminary skirmish occurred when Major Steele and a companion, scouting about near nightfall, suddenly came upon a few Indians resting, dismounted. One of them fired at Steele but missed him, and in return received bullets from the revolvers of Steele and the sergeant with him. The others made off in the dusk. The fallen Indian, a sub-chief of Big Bear's band, was found to bear on his breast a medal with the image of King George III of England, conferred for loyalty to Britain in the American Revolution, and handed down from father to son.

Big Bear's force was now close at hand, and General Strange decided to try to dislodge it from the position where it was prepared to make a stand. His force consisted of 197 infantry, 27 cavalry and Steele's scouts, a nine-pounder gun with a detachment of the Winnipeg



Light Infantry. In numbers this force was greatly inferior to that of Big Bear, but had the advantage of an artillery gun. In the action, however, this did not count for much owing to the nature of the ground.

The details of his attack make interesting reading in General Strange's own account, but it would serve no purpose to follow them closely here. Suffice it to say that the heroic assault could not overcome the defence afforded by the carefully chosen Indian position with its lines of rifle pits commanding the impassable morass that had to be crossed. After fruitless search for a weak spot, a withdrawal had to be decided upon. This could be carried out without any risk of pursuit by the enemy, who would have had to expose themselves.

One little episode in the process is perhaps worthy of mention. In the withdrawal all the wounded had been brought out except one private of the 65th Voltigeurs, whom the stretcher party refused to retrieve from the advanced position where he had fallen. They said he would die anyway. An officer with whom Strange remonstrated when he heard this, said: "General, I have been shot at quite enough today, and I am damned if I go down there again." When the thing was thus left to the General, he got together a stretcher party and, accompanied by a willing surgeon and a padre, made the attempt, ordering the artillery to keep up a brisk fire to cover the advance. The dying man was put on the stretcher and the party moved up the hill, General Strange following with the man's rifle. When the enemy's fire became hotter, the rear man dropped his end of the stretcher. For the rest of the way his place was taken by the General himself.

After the inconclusive fight with Big Bear General Strange withdrew his force to Fort Pitt. Food had run very low through mismanagement, boats carrying pro-



visions had been allowed to descend below the proper landing place; being unable to return against the current, in the end they had to be left to drift on down to Battleford. Fortunately an overdue convoy of provisions arrived from Edmonton next day.

After three days Strange moved east again, going round to the north, and found that Big Bear had pulled away from his entrenched position at Frenchman's Butte and that his force was disintegrating. From now on the campaign in the district was a scramble to find the trails of the various fractions of Big Bear's force and to try to overtake them. General Middleton came up the river from Battleford, reaching Fort Pitt with his main column on June 2, and next day with his mounted men joined General Strange. It is not necessary to tell in detail the marches hither and thither in pursuit of the scattering Indians, the securing of stores, etc., during the next three weeks. Some Indians were killed in the pursuit, some taken prisoners, many surrendered. By June 23 further search was abandoned and Middleton ordered the beginning of the return of the force down the Saskatchewan and homeward.

While the campaign against Big Bear was still on, people could not banish from their minds the question "What of the white prisoners in his camp?" Now, at last, the joyful answer could be given: all well and at liberty, restored to their friends. To the everlasting honour of the great Indian Chief Big Bear this was the happy ending. Even when they beheld their power inevitably collapsing, the savages of the Frog Lake atrocity of a few weeks ago did not break loose into a final riot of vengeance upon the white men and women still at their mercy. The two disconsolate women robbed of their husbands. Mrs. Gowanlock and Mrs. Delaney, the McLean family taken prisoners at Fort Pitt, Mr. W. B.

Cameron who has written the thrilling story, and the others, were happily able to report that while prisoners with Big Bear's band they were treated as well as the circumstances of the difficult wanderings allowed.

The general rejoicing at the happy ending was marred by the death of Colonel Williams, commander of the Midlanders, who had so distinguished himself at Batoche. While his battalion was stationed for a few days at Frog Lake they erected a large wooden cross to the memory of the victims of the massacre, bearing an inscription written by Colonel Williams himself. It was a tragedy for his men and a distressing shock for all who knew him that, just on the eve of a joyful homecoming, Colonel Williams, the gallant officer and genial gentleman, was called from the scene. Worn out by the physical and mental strain of the trying campaign, he died on board the steamer just after leaving Fort Pitt on the homeward journey. The doctors said he died of inflammation of the brain, with symptoms of typhoid fever.

Colonel Williams had represented East Durham in the Dominion parliament for many years. I had thus a personal interest in him, as he was a frequent visitor in my native village of Millbrook, the centre of the township of Cavan, in Colonel Williams's riding. I may be permitted to recall the last occasion on which I had a glimpse of him. It happened that I was a member of the main guard at Battleford one day when it was the Colonel's turn to be Grand Rounds. "Guard turn out" brought us briskly to attention as the sound of galloping hoofs was heard approaching. A few pleasant words to us on seeing that all was right, and Colonel Williams with his aide vanished into the darkness of the night. The next, and last, sign of his presence that I beheld was the flag at half-mast on the



steamer that bore his body down the river on the sad day in July, 1885.

While the pursuit of Big Bear was still on, General Middleton ordered Otter to hasten north from Battleford to intercept him if possible, in his flight east. We hiked up a hundred miles or so and circled round, discovered a few trails and picked up a few prisoners. But by this time Big Bear had abandoned his people and struck off accompanied only by a small boy. To find him was to look for a needle in a haystack. He knew more of our movements than we of his. On the verge of starvation, he gave himself up to a member of the Mounted Police near Fort Carlton. On our way home I had a glimpse of the dejected old chief in a cell of the Police barracks at Prince Albert. It was a pathetic sight.

I think I may now revert to the sudden order of our column to strike north. It so happened that some wagon loads of food which the good people of Toronto had sent up to relieve the monotony of pork, beans and hardtack, reached Battleford the very day we had to leave on our march. Now this was very tantalizing. But there was nothing for it but to leave the dainties behind. We privates could of course take nothing along. But the officers came off rather better. They did up a few boxes to be carried with the quartermaster's stores. When our half company was waiting down by the river-side to be ferried across, also waiting were some mysterious-looking boxes. One of our party, an intelligent forager, made a good guess at what they might contain. His sword bayonet was a handy tool that soon pried a couple of them open. Result — we had an unexpected and much appreciated snack then and there. To pry the boxes open was one thing, but to nail them up neatly again was another. After a while the Colonel and

some of our officers came along, also to be ferried over. When he saw what had been done, the Colonel lined us up and delivered a sermon which I wish I could have preserved in shorthand. For our O.C. was in command of a vocabulary that would meet the demands of any occasion. It savoured of the best Old Testament. We just withered into vermin. But the Colonel never knew who did it.

When the sermon was over, we rather took it for granted that he would call it square. But no. That evening after crossing he set us to work loading the steamer up with cordwood. We were late getting to bed, a poor preparation for the start north at daybreak. And there was more to come. We were put up in the van of the column, and for most of that blazing hot day were kept deploying and closing, deploying and closing, concertina style, till we were nearly dead, doing at least three times the distance of the straight march. We thought it was distinctly overdone.



## HOMeward BOUND

In point of numbers the campaign of '85 was a pigmy affair compared with what was to come upon the world a generation later. But in distances it was immense. From Toronto we had travelled 2,000 miles to reach the scene of conflict, and the field of operations covered an area 500 miles from east to west and 200 miles from south to north, that is, an oblong of a 100,000 square miles; and there were several excursions of many miles outside these limits. The immensity of that great central Canadian plain, with its tiny scattered population, is the chief impression that still remains with me. Through this mighty space coursed a great river that gave it a distinctive character and had so much to do with the military movements.

The Saskatchewan River has its double source at points a hundred miles apart in the Rocky Mountain snows. These two branches come together only after an eastward flow of some 800 miles. Then the united stream has a farther journey of 400 miles before finding a rest in Lake Winnipeg; from there it flows under a new name down to sea level in Hudson's Bay and the ocean beyond. After the junction of its two branches the Saskatchewan is deep enough to carry steamers of large size; but it is not quite continuous, being broken into nine miles of rapids before it reaches Lake Winnipeg. It was the upper stretches, however, of both North

and South Saskatchewan that we had to do with in the military operations. For the transport of troops and supplies the streams had to be used to the limit. But it was an uncertain and trying limit, often a serious and very annoying impediment to transportation. The streams were for the most part swift in current and irregularly shallow, with incalculable sandbars prevalent all along their route. The pilot threading his way between or over these could only guess where the deepest channel ran. To navigate at all on these upper stretches special steamers had to be built, drawing only three or four feet of water and propelled by a stern paddle-wheel. And a very remarkable kind of craft these sternwheelers were. I say *were*, for railways and trucks have long since driven them from the scene. They carried special apparatus for getting over, or off, the sandbars. This consisted of two long poles, one on each side of the bow, which were let down to hoist the boat over the sandbar—or perhaps farther onto it—by means of pulleys and ropes run by a separate steam-powered capstan. Again and again, more often on the down trip, delays sometimes of hours at a time, had to be counted on and laboriously overcome. Thus, the men wounded at Fish Creek had to wait many days in vain for the steamer to take them up to the hospital at Saskatoon, and were finally transported in wagons while the steamer was stuck on sandbars. Two companies of the Midlanders with their commander, Colonel Williams, were stuck for hours on their way down and barely reached Middleton's main force in time to take part in the fighting at Batoche.

There were no bridges on the Saskatchewan in 1885. At points here and there, where the river was narrower and the current strong, a crossing was effected by means of a wire cable strung tightly from shore to shore, with a scow attached to it by pulleys at the proper angle,



so that it was driven over by the current either way. This was the slow and not too reliable kind of ferry upon which General Middleton allowed the crossing of half of his column at Fish Creek to depend. With its unaccountable sandbars, shifting from season to season, the Saskatchewan remained a potential failure as a means of transporting troops and supplies. And yet there was something fascinating about its very difficulties. The one man who defied them all was Surgeon-Major Douglas in his canoe. There was one abrupt bend in the river which the flat-bottomed stern-wheeler could not negotiate by the rudder alone. To make the turn the captain ran the stub-nosed craft into the bank, and by reversing the wheel allowed the current to swing the bow round sufficiently to proceed.

But times have changed. The glory of the stern-wheeler is gone for ever and men travel no more by boat on the upper waters of the Saskatchewan. When we entered deeper water on our way home we bade farewell with a kind of homesickness to the strange stream and to the strange craft that plied pluckily upon it.

From Battleford down the Saskatchewan to its entrance into Lake Winnipeg was a pleasant but uneventful trip of 500 miles, interrupted near the end by a nine-mile stretch of rapids. A unique bit of fishing was afforded by these rapids. While we were waiting a day or two for some following troops to overtake us before starting across Lake Winnipeg, four of us managed to get some strong line and large hooks at the Hudson's Bay store. With these we walked the three or four miles to the rapids to try our luck. Isaac Walton wouldn't call it fishing at all. The pools along the stream were simply jammed with pike that tumbled over one another to get at the bait, which was just a bit of white rag on the hook. Some of them were



so big that not skill but strength was needed to pull them out on land. This was evidently a year when the fish population of the river had reached peak capacity. In half an hour we had hauled out all that we could carry back to camp. We cut thin poles and strung the fish on them through the gills. As we carried them, shoulder high, the tails of some nearly touched the ground. A drenching rain soaked us to the skin, but the moon came out again as we reached camp. Here we found a group of fellows sitting round a cheerful fire and enjoying a toddy of Hudson's Bay rum. Presently we were toasting some of our fish at the fire. Needless to say, a ready exchange took place—fish for rum punch—and we were warmed up, even though clothes were not just dry, when we turned in for the night in the barges awaiting us.

The 300-mile journey from the mouth of the river across Lake Winnipeg to Selkirk would have been merely long and slow, in a small steamer with two barges in tow, if the weather had been fine. But it was anything but that. A violent storm came up at night. Lying crosswise in the rolling barges you were one moment upright and the next standing on your head. If the towing rope had snapped under the strain, things would have been nasty—there was a fair chance that we who were in the barges would have been blown ashore and drowned. But the rope held, thanks to the good men who made it. And at last we were pulled through the narrows into Selkirk harbour, thankful to be safe and sound.

At Selkirk the paymaster gave us each an advance—I think \$40—from our accumulated pay in order that we should not be without pocket-money in Winnipeg. One of the fellows in our companion half-company who in the thirsty days of marching had kept reminding us of the number of John Collinses he was going



to have when drinks were available, apparently left quite a lot of his at the first Selkirk bar he got to. His pals took charge of him till he sobered up, probably to use the rest in the same way in Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg, outpost of civilization, we halted for four days, July 15 to 19, to begin the process of acclimatizing ourselves with friends we might know, and especially to see something of our fellow campaigners, the 90th of Winnipeg who served with Middleton's main column, and the Winnipeg Light Infantry who formed part of General Strange's column. For myself it was very pleasant to link up with some old Millbrookites now settled out west. We boarded the train shortly for Port Arthur, taking with us jolly memories of the Manitoban capital, as well as our boots, which were not quite pulled off by the gluey mud of the unpaved streets through which we had made a friendly show parade one day after heavy rain.

The two fine new C.P.R. steamers that now plied between Port Arthur and Owen Sound afforded a welcome variation in our mode of transportation. The gaps in the railway itself had been rapidly filled up during the summer, and we could have been taken all the way home by train, triumphant in easy travel along the North Shore of Lake Superior. Our crossing of the gaps on the way out, if I may quote one more comment on it (by the gallant Major Short of Kingston), "was the most awful journey any body of men could have made". But now the steamers saved us from weary travel by rail away around by Carlton Place and back west to Toronto. Not that accommodation on the steamer *Athabasca* was luxurious. We endured the three-day trip packed in so tight you could hardly move, on the floor, on tables—anywhere—and getting a meal only when the cooking capacity of the

steamer could get round to you. As we approached Sault Ste. Marie a dense fog held us up for some impatient hours. Then down past the Thirty Thousand Islands of Georgian Bay to Owen Sound. Here, I fear, the thoughts of the end of the journey at Toronto made us not quite so politely grateful as we should have been to the good people who delayed us with a lavish welcome. But at last we found ourselves—the Queen's Own, 10th Grenadiers and Governor-General's Body-guard—on board the train heading for the home city. In the middle of the afternoon of July 23 we detrained at the North Toronto C.P.R. station on Yonge Street amid the cheering crowd that can be imagined.

I remember one beautiful little touch in our welcome with great pleasure. Young girls had made hundreds of tiny bouquets of blue violets, and one was put in the muzzle of each rifle as we lined up for the march down Yonge Street. With rifles at the shoulder it was a pretty sight and a touching token of the warmth of our welcome home.

All the city was out to meet us, and it was through wildly enthusiastic lines of people all the way that we marched down to the familiar and inspiring notes of the Queen's Own bugle band. At the old Armouries below the St. Lawrence Market we were soon dismissed, with orders to parade for final disbanding next morning.

We men of "K" Company afterwards assembled at our Company Armoury at University College. Before final separation, photographs were in order, one of all of us on the steps before that marvellous main entrance to the College, another separate group of the men of my squad. For this our pal, G. E. Lloyd, had joined us, now chaplain of the Queen's Own, and with the rank of lieutenant since his recovery from the severe wound received in the fight at Cutknife.

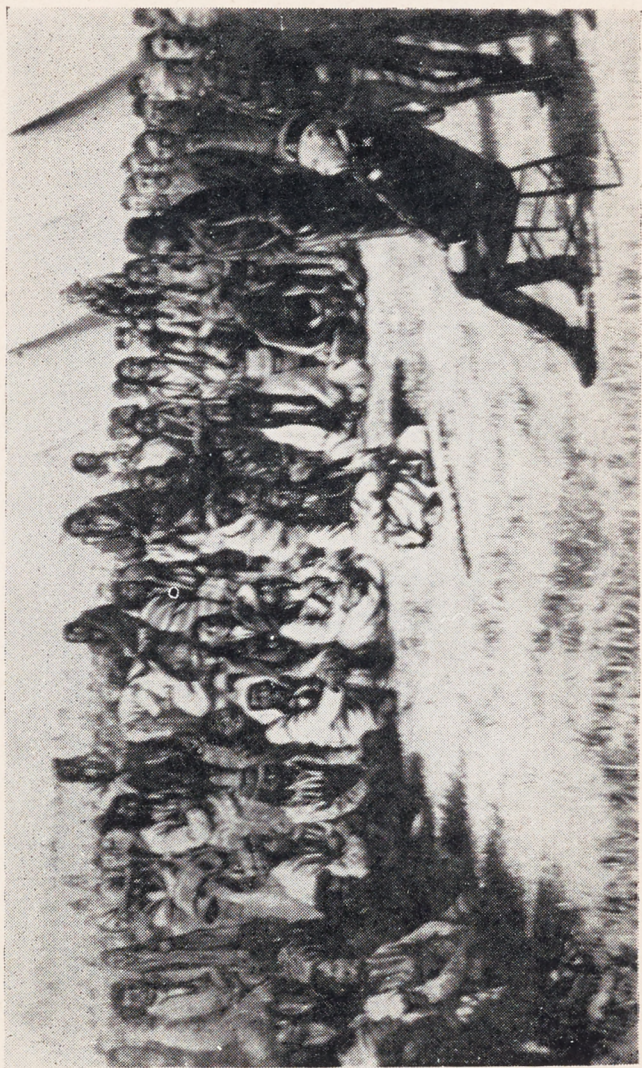


Professor Ellis and Professor VanderSmisen, both veterans of the Fenian Raid of 1866, with kind thoughtfulness provided lunch in the residence dining hall for those of us who had not yet left for homes outside the city.

## RIEL SPEAKS: VERSES AND A LETTER

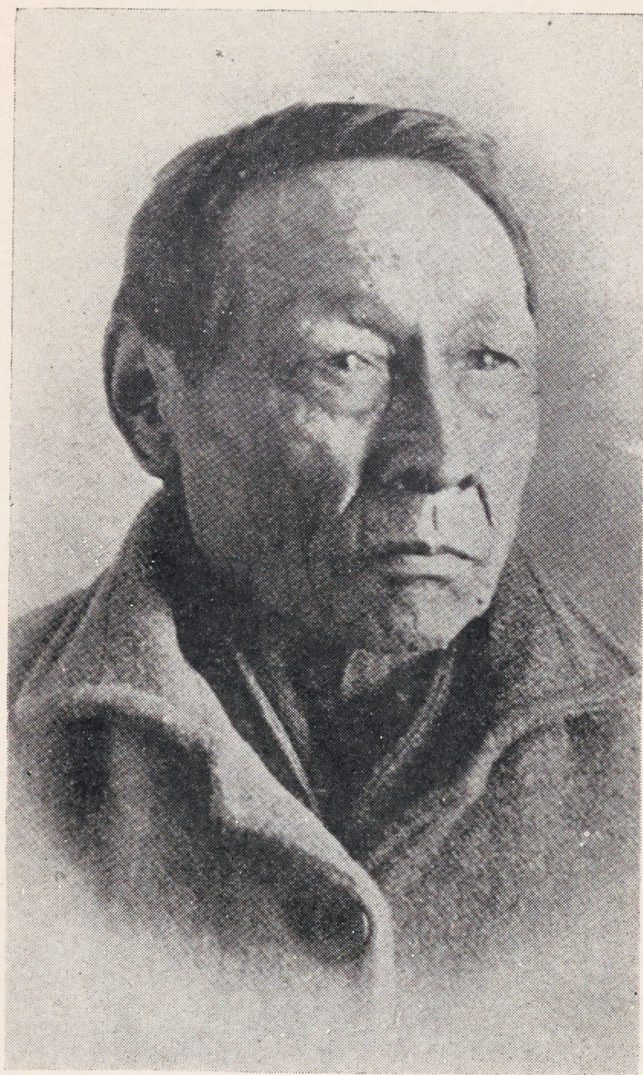
The rebellion which he had organized in Assinaboia 15 years before was suppressed by military force, and in 1871 Riel was driven into exile in the United States. A religious visionary, he had conceived the creation of a new Roman Catholic state in the west with a French-Canadian bishop as its pope. Brooding over the collapse of his grandiose scheme, he became mentally deranged and for two years, 1876 to 1878, had to be committed to care in an asylum. It is not surprising to find him turning in the following year to the writing of verse, largely of a religious cast. Soon after his execution these poetic efforts were collected by his friends and published in a booklet under the title *Poesies religieuses et politiques*. Political verse which he also indulged in is here included; it has for its principal target Sir John A. Macdonald. The religious poems are dedicated to Archbishop Taché of Saint Boniface and other Roman Catholic prelates, and express the highly emotional religious fervor of the author. It is not quite lofty poetry; but it does display a considerable dexterity in rhyming and variety of metrical form. As these poems are so little known, and yet throw such a valuable sidelight on the man who six years later led a new rebellion aimed at the establishment of a French-Canadian state in the west or assisting ultimately perhaps in the absorption of western Canada by the United States, I will quote at





*The Surrender of Poundmaker*





*Big Bear*



length from them here. The political poems are enlightening as to Riel's state of mind.

The following examples will give some idea of the whole:

Alexandre Antonin Taché!

Vous avez accompli des œuvres qui m'enchantent.  
Du haut des Monts-Rocheux mon front se tient penché  
Sous votre main. Mon cœur et mon esprit vous chantent.

. . . . .

Sous votre épiscopat les familles Métisses  
Ont fait plus de progrès en trente ou quarante ans  
Que des gouvernements riches, pleins d'injustices.

. . . . .

Soixante et dix vous fait honneur.  
Votre autorité salutaire  
A fait du bien à l'Angleterre,  
Sa Puissance vous doit, je pense, le bonheur  
Des œuvres qu'Elle vante à la Rivière Rouge,  
Mais elle m'a fait mal, aussitôt que je bouge  
Je sens l'horreur des coups que son bras m'a portés.

Monseigneur, je vous remercie  
D'avoir pris votre part de nos difficultés,  
Assuré que, sans vous, une tombe noircie  
Couvrirait à jamais les cendres de mon corps,  
On parlerait de moi comme on fait des victimes  
De trente-sept.; l'Eglise et mes amis intimes  
Reconnaîtraient, c'est vrai, mes généreux efforts,  
Mais je serais parmi les hommes qui sont morts.

Mais votre conduite si circonspecte, honnête,  
Des motifs élevés guident vos actions,  
Je vous ai vu parmi les chefs et les champions:  
Vous étiez plus grand qu'eux tous, de toute la tête.

. . . . .

Puisque les sommités avaient été fières  
De vous autoriser du ton le plus flatteur  
En Termes généreux et pleins de latitude



A vous rendre chez vous, en Pacificateur,  
Afin d'y mettre un terme à notre inquiétude,  
A tout le trouble dont le gouvernement rude  
D'Ottawa, seul était l'auteur.

The political verse, which makes up about one third of the little volume, is addressed to Sir John A. Macdonald. It is a vicious onslaught upon John A. and all his works. The Dominion government and its imperial representatives are condemned, the empire itself is going to crash for its iniquities some day. Sir John, he says, offered him \$35,000 (piastres) if he would desert his people for three years.

Sir John A. Macdonald gouverne avec orgueil  
Les Provinces de la Puissance,

Et sa Mauvaise foi veut prolonger mon deuil  
Afin que son pays l'applaudisse et l'encense.

Au lieu de la paix qu'il me doit  
Au lieu de respecter d'une manière exacte  
Notre Pacte  
Et mon droit

Depuis bientôt dix ans, Sir John me fait la guerre.  
Un homme sans parole est un homme vulgaire,  
Fort ou faible d'esprit, moi, je le montre au doigt.

Il a voulu jeter dans la sombre disgrâce  
Le prelat de Saint Boniface.

Il a trompé l'évêque, et puis l'a démenti  
A mots couverts, avec assez de politesse

Pour cacher sa scélératesse,  
Et contenter ses gens sans nuire à son parti.

Ses discours sont fins; c'est le chef du Parlement,

Il est assis parmi les princes du royaume,

Mais à peine Sir John sera-t-il un atôme

Lorsque Dieu le fera paraître au jugement.

Et qui sait même, dès ce monde,

S'il ne faudra pas qu'il réponde

De n'avoir été qu'un menteur

Sans principes et sans honneur.

Sir John offrit trente-cinq mille piastres

Si je voulais deserter pour trois ans  
Ma nation dans ses désastres;  
Et laisser mon ami Lépine, dans le temps  
Que ses mains et ses pieds portaient des fers sanglants.

Ah! Je me suis trouvé content de voir à terre  
Un bon matin, Sir John avec son ministère!

Dans le Bas Canada, la classe gouvernante  
Dit généralement qu'elle est fière et contente  
D'obéir à l'anglais; qu'il est pour nous courtois  
Et bon de nous laisser faire nos propres lois.

Mais croit-on que l'anglais fera jamais outrage  
Aux canadiens-français qui font bien son ouvrage,  
L'anglais est égoïste et plein d'ambition,  
Il lui faut pour agents des âmes aussi viles  
Qu'habiles.

Aussi s'applique-t-il, dans notre nation,  
A gagner les plus forts d'entre les plus serviles.  
Vos titres, votre argent, vos emplois, vos menaces  
Gatent, à mon avis, surtout les hautes classes  
Du peuple. Vous aimez les principes nouveaux,  
Vous voudriez que déjà notre foi fut perdue,  
Aussi vous parlez fort sur l'influence indue,  
Et vous menez nos chefs comme de queues de viaux  
Dans les chambres provinciales  
Et dans les chambres fédérales.

Dufferin fût habile à rejeter ma cause,  
Je suis sûr que ce Vice-Roi  
N'aurait pas voulu pour grand' chose  
Qu'Ottawa fût fidèle à l'honneur envers moi.

(Dufferin was clever at seducing French Canadians by lavish entertainment at Rideau Hall. When the guests were hilarious with choice wines and liqueurs he could flatter them cunningly with praise of Lower Canada. He charmed the old city of Quebec with promises of beautifying it, but his brilliant wit and smooth words never blinded me. In league with the imperial court, he but heaped contempt upon the Métis and the French Canadians.)



Je ris de ceux qui font passer la flatterie  
Avant l'amour sacré qu'on doit à la Patrie.  
J'ai droit de rire, moi, du comte Dufferin,  
Ce *mort-né* qui sortit du sein meurtrie d'Erin  
En présentant non pas sa tête la première  
Mais en offrant son derrière  
Le premier à la lumière.

Dufferin et sa femme ont repassé la mer,  
L'ennui de les avoir perdus n'est pas amer.

Sachez que Washington est plus prochain de nous  
Que Londres. Vos voisins sont plus nobles que vous.  
Prenez garde. Je puis sans gêne vous le dire,  
Pour ma part, je vous veille. Et je suis décidé  
Depuis longtemps. Tout votre empire  
Craque; il a trop joué ses vilains coups de dès.

Les nombreux rejetons de L'Irlande indomptable  
Ne sont pas, sans dessein, dans les Etats-Unis.  
Le jour qu'ils se mettront sous un chef acceptable,  
Et qu'ils voudront marcher dans des chemins bénis,  
Les canadiens-français et les Métis sincères  
Marcheront avec eux comme avec de bons frères;  
Et sans aucun embarras  
Ils leur ouvriront les bras.

Si vous ne voulez pas que notre fière race  
Se détache sitôt de vous,  
Traitez la comme il faut, puisque elle est à sa place.  
Ne vous en montrez pas insensément jaloux.

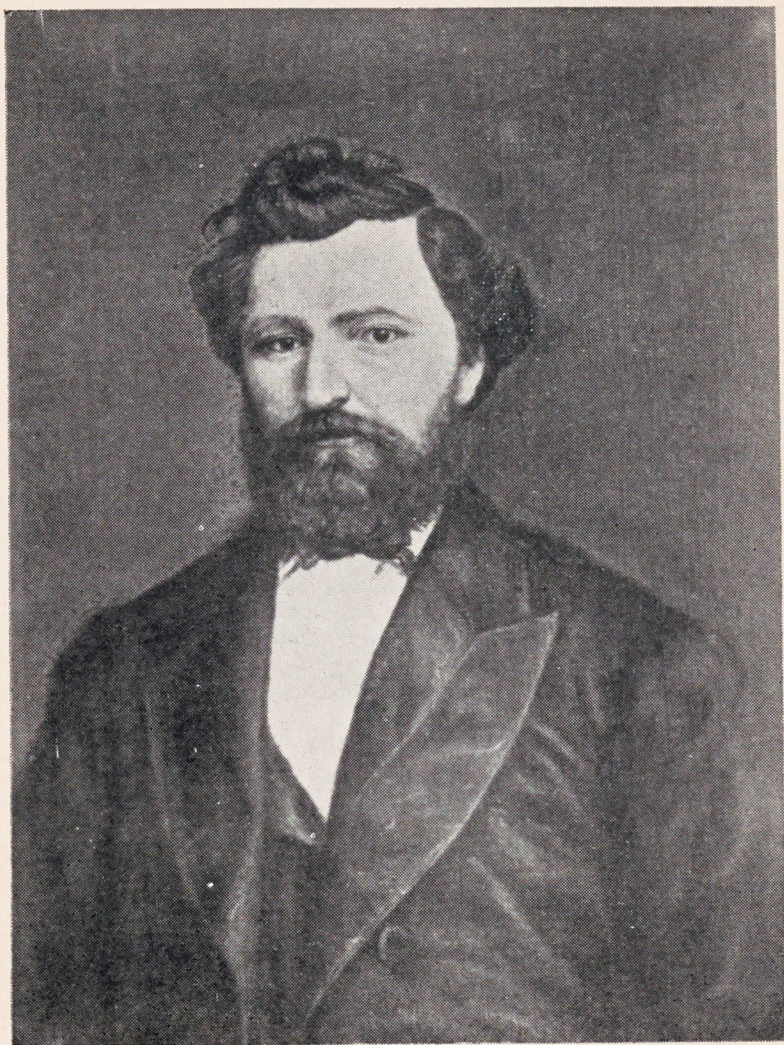
—Louis "David" Riel

Daté à Saint Joseph, Dakota, Août 1879

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Through the kindness of Mr. Eric Duke Scott, who owns the original autograph, I am able to publish here a copy of this significant letter of Louis Riel. As may be seen by the date, May 6, 1885, Riel wrote it three days before the final four-day battle at Batoche began. Right up to the last moment, then, he was looking for aid from the people of "indomitable Ireland" settled in the United States, whom, as he says in his





*Louis Riel*



(Private) (Return to sender)

Batoche, N. W. T., May 6<sup>th</sup> 1885  
Mr F. Ford  
New York

Dear Sir

The Enclosed manuscript  
you will please put together and correct  
in your own way and publish in  
the Irish World Any changes you  
make in it will be agreeable to me,  
as I know your heart and soul in  
our cause. You must remember  
I cannot write anything as I should  
as great excitement now prevails in  
camp. I cannot send by Mail but by  
hand to Shakopee, Minn., where several  
sympathizers are, and to where a courier line  
is established now

Respectfully Yours  
Louis Riel

Riel's Letter

verses addressed to Sir John A. Macdonald, the French Canadians and the sincere Métis were ready to receive with open arms.

On the reverse side of Riel's letter is written in pencil, obviously by the recipient: "May 15—Riel captured; May 18—Letter reached N.Y." Well, things had happened at Batoche since it was sent off by courier on the 6th. Batoche was overrun on the 12th, and Riel surrendered on the 15th. It is doubtful whether the enclosure was ever published in the *Irish World* in New York, as the editor had learned before he received it that Riel was out of the picture for good.



PROFESSOR NEEDLER, the author of this book, is a native of Ontario, of mingled English, Scottish and Irish ancestry. After graduation at the University of Toronto he studied for four years in Europe, chiefly in Germany, and took the degree of Ph.D. at the University of Leipzig. In 1891 he was appointed to the staff in German in University College, Toronto, where he continued to teach for forty-five years, being head of the department of German for several years before his retirement as *Professor emeritus* in 1936. Professor Needler's chief publications are: a metrical translation of *The Nibelungenlied*; *The Lone Shieling*; *Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe*; *John Galt's Dramas*; *Goethe and Scott*; *Reminiscences of Sir Walter Scott's Residence in Italy 1832*, by Sir William Gell; *Otonabee Pioneers*.

As corporal in the University Company of the Queen's Own Rifles he served with Otter's Column in the Riel Rebellion of 1885. This experience he has recorded in the present book, in *The Battleford Column* and in an edition of General Middleton's *Suppression of Rebellion in the Northwest Territories of Canada, 1885*. In the World War of 1914-18 Major Needler had command of the Overseas Training Company of the University of Toronto C.O.T.C.



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LOUIS RIEL

G. H. NEEDIER

FURNS AND  
MAGNETIC